

/154.636776M>C1/



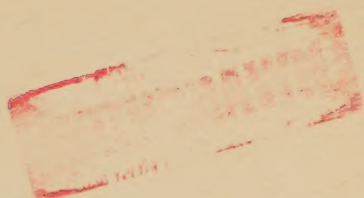
Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2024

THE MEANING OF DREAMS

THE MEANING OF DREAMS

BY
ROBERT GRAVES

11117



Theodore Lownik Library
Illinois Benedictine College
Lisle, Illinois 60532



NEW YORK
GREENBERG, PUBLISHER, INC.
1925

Theodore Lownik Library
Illinois Benedictine College

154.63
G776m

Printed in Great Britain
By Fox, Jones & Co., Kemp Hall Press, High Street, Oxford.

TO SUSAN
AND
JOHN BUCHAN

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

PAST THEORIES AS FAR AS FREUD

PAGE

INTENTION to reconcile opposing theories both of old and new psychology. "Commonsense" view of dreams as a pointless joke, but with an occasional exception conveying an important revelation. Primitive people's belief in dreams as inspiration from God or gods. The primitive dream-interpreter and his methods. Dream manuals of fixed interpretations compiled from recorded cases. Modern survivals of these dream superstitions, the relics of ancient religious sciences almost killed by spread of logic. Even religious people keep religious beliefs and practical beliefs in water-tight compartments. Scientific observations of bodily states influencing dreams, bounded by view that in dreams imagination runs wild and reason is overruled. Freud as the good and bad fairy at the christening of the new science of interpretation. Dreams as 'passionate wishes unexpressed in waking life.' The idea of dream symbols restored in a changed form. Meaning of symbolism. War-dreams disprove theory that only passionate wishes form dreams. All fears and wishes, gratified or not, all experience emotional or intellectual, in conflict or in harmony, can form subject of dreams. The so-called "unconscious self," the primitive bogey man. .

CHAPTER II

THEORY OF DOUBLE-SELF

	PAGE
DR. RIVERS ; his views on the double-self. Examples from the religious hypocrite, the case of double-identity (with reference to Stevenson's <i>Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde</i>) the cleptomaniac and megalomaniac. Unconscious self as the beaten side in any conflict. Instances. The reformed drunkard and his dream of Mr. Cadville. The vision or dream before he signed the pledge. Visions as only more impressive dreams than others. Possible exception, visions of ancient history. Dreams of the bereaved. Dreams of disappointed ambition. .	19

CHAPTER III

PRIMITIVE THOUGHT

FANTASTIC dreams in deep sleep, more direct dreams in light sleep. Symbolism of deep sleep dreams rules out time, space, probability. Jabberwocky. Standing outside oneself. Composite characters. Dream of Captain in Medical Corps. Forgetting dreams. Depends on nature of conflict and on attitude of waking self to the fantastic. The dreamer while conflict persists unable to interpret his own dreams. Thought in symbolism and by associations of words occurs also in waking life. Stony Stratford. The survival of the Primitive or Infantile into sophisticated adult life ; weakness of the new psychologists on this point. Illustration from Captain's dream. Due to thinking logical thought superior to associative thought. Freud's Censorship theory possibly due to same cause. The Primitive can be as complex as the sophisticated ; as when a child learns to classify experience. The primitive Esquimaux and Indians. .	33
---	----

CHAPTER IV

VARIETIES OF DREAMS

PAGE

DREAMS of solution. The insulin dream. No reason for such dreams to be misunderstood if symbolism is straightforward. How far a general table of symbols and their meaning is admissible. Dreams of nakedness; flying and swimming dreams. Jung and theory of inherited dream-symbols. Question of survival of primitive again. Lady Threlwall and the mushroom dream. The same dream dreamed by friends without previous communication. Dreams within dreams when waking self is apparently partly active. Dreams of pure joy, inadequately explained as mere compensation for unhappy waking life. The prophetic dream in various aspects. If we do not start by considering mental activity during sleep as either better or worse than that of waking life, the prophetic dream is not a problem. The same with dream of events happening at a distance. . . .	63
--	----

CHAPTER V

SURVIVAL OF THE PAST AND OTHER PROBLEMS

HISTORY of dream interpretation again examined. Each theory right up to a point. Bergson's view. The dream of the Dead Hand. Bodily states concurrent with dreams not causative. Survival of the past again. Dream of falling from a mast. Dreams of examinations long after school days are over. The Siren dream. Dreams of many meanings at same time. Dream of turning a large car in a narrow lane. Where there are many meanings these are all linked together by common interests. The dream of a triangular railway-station. Interpretation of dream will not end

conflict. It may end a long-established nightmare but this is only a temporary relief. Dream of interrupted melody. Transference from one plane to another cannot end conflict. Nor can giving way to the side hitherto beaten in conflict. No room for compromise, either. Suggested solution for reformed drunkard conflict. Recovering memories by "free association." Hopelessness of theory of past surviving unchanged. History of John Doe. Why nursery memories occur in dreams.	79
--	----

CHAPTER VI

VALUE OF DREAMS ON THEIR OWN ACCOUNT

VALUE of dreams on own account apart from their meaning in terms of waking experience. Objections to the reality of dreams. These objections met. Difficulty of checking dream-interpretations scientifically. Admission of author's own habit of condensing and synchronising dreams so as to clarify argument. Licence claimed by poets and novelists of telling truth by condensation. This same method used in dreams. Scientific method sure but very slow. Example from the Dragonfly problem. Illustrations of theory occur to me structurally complete by the natural associative method.	105
---	-----

CHAPTER VII

PRACTICAL BENEFITS OF INTERPRETATION

CRIME and ill-health. Samuel Butler's forecast in <i>Erewhon</i> of psycho-analysts. Relationship of dreamer and interpreter. Danger of patient

TABLE OF CONTENTS

xi

PAGE

leaning too heavily on the interpreter. Dreaming to suit or to oppose interpreter's psychological theories. Advantage of confessional. Most doctors can do little but start a new phase of conflict. Re-establishment of Mrs. X's romance, no solution. Miss Y and her dead sweetheart; no solution seems possible. Mrs. Z. and the child in the foundling hospital: solution made possible by interpretation of dreams. The mind-healer and the body-healer. Rival methods founded on opposite philosophical assumptions. Unsatisfactory compromise in recent Church report on faith-healing. The ideal treatment. Practical tests for the psychanalyst and the psycho-therapist.	115
--	-----

CHAPTER VIII

DREAMS AND POETRY

intimate connection of dreams and poetry. Classical and Romantic. History in detail of the composition of Keats' <i>La Belle Dame sans Merci</i> : its symbolism. The same treatment applied to Coleridge's <i>Kubla Khan</i> , and a poem, <i>The Gnat</i> , by the author himself. Reader's recognition of poet's meaning by analogy from his own experience. Value of poetry and of religious experience on their own account apart from psychological interpretations.	135
--	-----

CHAPTER I

PAST THEORIES AS FAR AS FREUD

THE MEANING OF DREAMS

CHAPTER I

PAST THEORIES AS FAR AS FREUD

THERE have been many different ways, which I shall give in some detail, of approaching this long-standing mystery—the source and meaning of our dreams. There is a temptation when discussing a subject so much argued over, to take a fist as it were in the face of anyone who holds an opposite theory, calling him fool or error. This is not my intention here, particularly since the extremely bitter “ I’m right and you’re wrong ” attitude of the rival schools of what is called “ The New Psychology ” has left the general public bewildered and a trifle weary; this is the time to reconcile views hitherto conflicting both of the new psychology and the old; not by throwing weight more heavily into one scale than another, nor by making a compromise that fully satisfies neither party, but in each case by making a new suggestion in the light of which the question need not arise as to which of the opposing parties is more right than the other.

For the most part nowadays the difficulty of finding a key to unlock any but the very simplest

THE MEANING OF DREAMS

dreams—and even then it is not a skeleton key for use on every occasion—has driven common-sense folk to dismiss the whole business as a sort of pointless joke played on them by unknown forces. They find most of their dreams quite unlike anything in what they call their practical waking life, and if asked to make a comparison would agree that dreams are like the tuning of the instruments before an orchestra plays ; and that the waking life which follows dreaming is like the same instruments played together under a conductor. These people will certainly admit that if they listen closely to this tuning of instruments, the humorously called *King of Siam's Overture*, they can distinguish scales and scraps of melody and even whole tunes ; every instrument is probably playing *something*. So in their dreams they will admit that they can often recognise scraps and shreds of yesterday's experience, but cannot regard the dreams as more than a patchwork of these scraps and shreds. And yet, the most common-sense person will probably admit if you get him alone, that perhaps once in his life he did dream a dream which seemed to him absolutely real and as important as any event in his waking life, a dream perhaps conveying an unusual message of hope or warning. All other dreams may be nonsense but this, he will say, was different.

PAST THEORIES AS FAR AS FREUD

The occasional appearance of such portents possibly accounts for the intense interest taken in dreams even by those who pretend to despise them.

“ Primitive ” peoples, by which I mean peoples who lived before the present scientific age or are living now in still uncivilised parts, always take their dreams seriously. The Old Testament clearly shows in what religious awe dreams were held in every country with which it is concerned, from Joseph’s ancient Egypt to Daniel’s Babylon and David’s Jerusalem. The New Testament is also concerned with dreams, and ends with one of the most sustained and complicated dream-visions ever recorded, the Revelation of St. John the Divine, so that upholders of our national religion who regard dreams as nonsensical may be charged with denying the sacred literature on whose authority this religion rests. A study of the religious beliefs of primitive races throughout the world will show everywhere the greatest importance given to dreams as being in some way or other a direct revelation to man by various unseen gods, demons or spirits, or by a supreme God ; and everywhere one of the most important duties of the priest or prophet is to explain to his fellow worshippers the meaning of any dreams that puzzle them. It will be easily

THE MEANING OF DREAMS

understood that the priest is often baffled by such a task, especially when he is for some reason or other unable to get into personal touch with the Power or powers which he believes are responsible for the dreams. There are then several courses open to him. He can either say that the dream is a false one inspired by demons and therefore to be disregarded, purification of the dreamer only being necessary ; or he can make a shrewd guess at what guilty trouble is disturbing the dreamer's mind and explain the dream as showing Divine anger at his guilt ; or he can say that he does not know, but for a fee will consult the powers again and they will reveal him the meaning in another dream.

The Oracles of the Old World were centres of this dream-interpretation and the priests or priestesses were people—we would now call them mediums—who could make themselves dream at will. In religious colleges where students were trained in these arts of dream-interpretation, it was evidently found convenient in case direct inspiration failed to have a general method to fall back upon, for manuals were carefully compiled from known cases in which dreams had been satisfactorily interpreted and from these the student could get the general hang of the thing. Similar manuals can still be bought by the superstitious (I am

PAST THEORIES AS FAR AS FREUD

not using the word in an insulting sense) and in them one may read of lucky dreams and unlucky dreams, how to dream of a man drowning means disappointment in business, to dream of a snake means that a loved one is false, and to dream of a locked box means a fortune coming soon ; how a dream dreamed on Friday always comes true ; how to dream of anything on the left hand is unlucky and on the right hand lucky, and a lot more in the same strain. These books are usually adorned with queer figures and emblems ; interesting survivals of the very old science of astrology (the foretelling of the future by means of stars) in which Daniel and Moses must both have been expert and which in the Gospels is said to have guided Caspar, Melchior and Balthazar from their far-off courts to the inn at Bethlehem. But astrology in such works is no longer the exact and glorious science it once was when it went hand in hand with astronomy : to trust to modern popular astrologers is to trust in people who have forgotten the art they profess. These dream manuals are full of such interesting relics of astrology and other ancient sciences : for instance the idea about the luckiness of the right hand or left is a survival of a religious science called " augury " in which the future was foretold by observing the flight of birds ;

THE MEANING OF DREAMS

whether they appeared on the right or left made all the difference between lucky or unlucky. The belief about the dreams dreamed on Friday night is probably of Jewish origin : the Sabbath started at dusk on Friday and a dream dreamed on Friday night could not therefore be the work of demons.

Some of the fixed interpretations I have mentioned, such as a snake for a betrayal, or a dove for love and peace, have been handed down from one dream text-book to another or from mouth to mouth for many centuries, and are not altogether to be despised for reasons which I will give later ; but on the whole these books which differ very greatly among themselves are not to be recommended even as recording the wisdom of the past. In Europe the movement towards common sense in philosophy, science, history and all other branches of thought has its roots in the writings of the ancient Greeks, particularly in the system of Aristotle who wrote in the fourth century before Christ : Aristotle's works were throughout the Middle Ages and later venerated as worthy companions to the Scriptures.¹ He is the founder of Logic, a system of thought which holds that any problem can be solved in a simple manner

¹ In mediæval Oxford, students were liable to a fine of five shillings for any act of disbelief in Aristotle's system.

PAST THEORIES AS FAR AS FREUD

by a certain general method of putting two and two together to make four ; and by making experiments and drawing universal rules from the results. Aristotle's logical method could not make head or tail of this business of dreaming, or find in it any two or two to put together to make anything like four ; so Aristotelians have decided that any attempt to do so is hopeless. Dreams, they hold, are vague illusive images running through the mind without sense or order, and the wise man would not invite madness by paying any attention to them. Now, if Aristotle or his followers had been able to find a table of fixed meaning for dreams, one that always worked, they would no doubt have been delighted ; finding only confusion, contradiction and lies, they gave it up. This attitude until a few years ago held the field in all branches of European thought except in so far as it was necessary to respect the dreams recorded in the Bible and the interpretations there given of them. But it will be admitted that even religious people keep two watertight compartments in their minds, one for practical modern life, the other for their religious beliefs, and do not think of connecting the two. Dreams, they hold, may have meant things in scriptural times, but not now. And yet St. Peter's dream about the sheet descending

THE MEANING OF DREAMS

from heaven is, in the Acts of the Apostles, given an interpretation which, except for its claim of divine origin, most modern students of dreams, however atheistic or agnostic, would approve as correct.

In spite of the Aristotelian ban, certain general observations have been made by scientists about the bodily states influencing dreams, the effect for instance on the dreamer of heavy eating or of worry, and guesses made as to what part of the night we dream most in, the usual length of dreams, and so on. Bergson the famous French philosopher recorded how, when we sleep, the mind exaggerates the slight sounds heard of cracking furniture, mice, wind and so on and weaves long stories out of them. He gave an instance of startling dreams caused, as he said, by a lantern flashed by a nurse on night duty in the faces of her various patients. He suggested among other things that flying dreams are caused by the lying position in bed; the feet being free of their usual task of supporting the weight of the body, the mind fancies it can fly. Dream-pictures, he said, start in the blobs of colour that swim before our sleeping eyes and get exaggerated in the way that our mind exaggerates when we see pictures in the fire or in the clouds. Such observations were very useful in their way, but had little to do

PAST THEORIES AS FAR AS FREUD

with the *meaning* of particular dreams, and the scientists who made these notes would have said, and did say, that dreams were caused by 'the imagination, that is the part of the mind that makes images, running wild when the controlling part of the mind, the reason, takes a rest.'

The first man who, being a scientist, definitely set himself to disentangle the meaning of dreams and particularly the general mechanism of the dream, was an Austrian doctor still living called Freud ; he holds an interesting position, as having been both the good fairy and the bad fairy at the christening of a new science of dream interpretation. While he has given the first clue to a better understanding of these matters, and put together most important examples of the connection between the dream life and waking life of his patients of differing ages and sexes, he has got this science a notoriously bad reputation among the general public by the frequency with which his books treat on the problems of sex, and by his view that dreams must for the most part be given a sexual interpretation.

Freud's position is briefly this, that every dream is expressing some sort of desire which the dreamer in his waking life has not been able to attain and, more than that, has not even

THE MEANING OF DREAMS

dared to consider, because somehow horrible, or unnatural or very strongly disapproved of by the neighbourhood. These wishes are centred in the passions and in order to account for children dreaming, Freud has been forced to say that even very small children are subject to the same inclinations and passions as grown persons ; it is this theory that has given Freud most ill-fame and frightened away the common-sense man more than ever from the subject, particularly as the Freudian theory soon attracted to Vienna a number of students who liked nastiness for its own sake, so that the work which they did on the lines the Professor laid down often had nastiness as its chief aim : then Freud's heading " the passions ", which he intended in a broad sense, became more and more restricted, so that Freud has been perhaps unjustly blamed for the findings of his disciples.

Freud showed very plainly that in dreams the mind, even the mind of a rational straightforward practical man, instead of thinking in the usual way, frequently thinks in symbols. Indeed, Freud's strongest claim to fame is that he dared to bring back though in a changed form the idea that dreams are symbolic ; an idea which had as I say been long discredited because

PAST THEORIES AS FAR AS FREUD

it seldom worked out right, especially when the dreams were supposed to be solely prophetic.

The word "symbol" perhaps calls for an illustration or two. Outside the Bible the most familiar example of a symbolic dream is *The Pilgrim's Progress*, but it would be fitter not to treat in detail of religious dreams, where others can be found more suitable for examination in a scientific spirit. If then, a man dreams about a neighbour of his called Smith, the chances are that instead of actually seeing Smith in his dreams looking and walking and talking like Smith, he may seem instead to meet a man shoeing horses in a smithy, and this is what we call a *symbol* of Smith ; or if Smith is remarkable for some deformity like a hump or a long nose, Smith may appear in the dream as a camel or an elephant. If Smith were an engineer by profession, efficient and steady-going, he might well be symbolised as one of his own smooth-running machines. If Smith was thought of in the dream as a depressing visitor to the dreamer's house he might well be symbolised as an epidemic of influenza ; (on the other hand an epidemic of influenza might be symbolised as a visit by Smith). There is no end to the different forms that Smith may take according to the way people think of him, though it is probable that there is some peculiarity about

THE MEANING OF DREAMS

his name, personal appearance or profession, that will make certain symbols do duty for him more frequently than others. In my own case, where I occur in the dreams of my friends, they usually appear to be walking in a churchyard: the play on my name GRAVES is an obvious one, but whether the atmosphere of the churchyard is gloomy or pleasant depends on my relations at the time with the dreamer. It will generally be found that where a symbol is used it is appropriate for more than one reason. For instance, Dr. Rivers, about whom I shall speak at length in the next chapters, frequently found himself symbolised in his patients' dreams as a river or rivers; but where these patients were putting great confidence in his powers of helping them to recover from nervous disorders, the Biblical phrase "Rivers of healing" lent additional force to the symbolism.

This general theory of symbols then is the first step in the understanding of dreams, so long as the symbols are no longer expected always to deal prophetically with the future. The next step is to discover how, why and where these symbols occur, and at this point modern psychologists, so far in agreement, begin to differ seriously.

Freud's idea is that when wishes have not been able to appear in the waking life, but we

PAST THEORIES AS FAR AS FREUD

fall asleep and what he calls "the unconscious self", that is the part of the mind that has these wishes, takes control, then the dreams express these wishes. These do not come in any direct way because, Freud suggests, there is a sort of Censor which forbids "the conscious self" to receive them, and the "unconscious self" has to put everything into cypher to baffle this censor. The censor idea though not, I believe, the correct explanation, gives a good notion of the form symbolic dreams take: sometimes the cypher is one which almost everyone can read whether they know much or little about the dreamer, at other times it is so complicated and depends for its understanding on the knowledge of so many half-forgotten incidents and petty details of the dreamer's life which nobody but himself can be expected to know, that a correct and full interpretation is out of the question.

Freud's theory about dreams put forward some years before the war was, as I have said, bound up with the notion that all dreams concern a disappointment to the passions; when the war came, however, and some of the best qualified doctors in this country spent all their energies in trying to cure soldiers suffering from "shell shock," it was discovered that the dreams of these soldiers, the doctors' best guides to

THE MEANING OF DREAMS

the nature of their illness, were in nine cases out of ten not concerned with passionate instincts at all, but with danger-instincts aroused by experiences in battle; and it is now pretty generally agreed among more advanced psychologists that dreams may arise from all sorts of hopes, fears, problems, and solutions in the previous waking life of the dreamer. All or nearly all writers about dreams use this expression, "the unconscious" or "the sub-conscious self"; they explain it as being responsible for all dreams, and describe it in various ways. The most general notion, which I cannot accept, is that every grown man and woman has a sort of hidden bogey inside them, with the uncontrolled emotion of a child or savage, and as little sense of the decencies or refinements of civilized life as this same child or savage, and that all dreams are the work of this creature. It cannot be denied that in some cases dreams are of this unfortunate kind, but only where there is childishness or hankering after indecency controlled with difficulty in the waking life. So also it must be admitted that the fixed table of symbols that Freud and another Swiss professor, Jung, suggest, does sometimes work out, but only in cases where there is some unusual serious disturbance in the dreamer's affections or passions.

CHAPTER II
THEORY OF DOUBLE-SELF



CHAPTER II

THEORY OF DOUBLE-SELF

THESE first modern attempts at discovering the meaning of dreams went, wrong because people like Freud and Jung got hold of a little bit of truth and tried to stretch it further than it easily would in explaining *all* dreams ; it snapped back on their fingers like elastic. A more reliable writer on this subject was an Englishman, the late Doctor Rivers of Cambridge, a biologist, neurologist, anthropologist, psychologist, a pioneer in every branch of science he undertook, during the war curing mental cases in a shell-shock hospital in Scotland, where the writer first made his acquaintance. In his two books, *Instinct and the Unconscious* and *Conflict and Dreams*¹, Dr. Rivers has done a great service to science by criticising the very loose thinking of the Freudians and Jungians, and putting the whole matter in a more reasonable and attractive form. Dr. Rivers in an argument based on a long acquaintance with cases of "abnormal" psychology, traces the

¹ Cambridge University Press.

THE MEANING OF DREAMS

part played in dreams by what is called Dissociation, that is the breaking up of the human individual into two or more rival "selves" under the stress of difficult circumstances. I am trying throughout this book to avoid the use of any technical words at all, and so I shall explain Dr. Rivers' views and my own with as little quotation as possible from scientific works.

When we discuss a man, one John Jones, and say that we would know John Jones anywhere, this may seem obvious and true, yet when we come to examine John Jones it is possible that two or more John Jones's who are very hostile to each other may appear in the one person. For instance, it is a melancholy but very common experience to discover that of the most religious members of church or chapel, who sing hymns loudest and talk in the most respectably religious manner, many in private life fall very short of their religion ; they are mean, uncharitable, cruel, and bring their place of worship into ill fame. Now, that is called canting hypocrisy and is a much detested habit ; but I am going to say this for the hypocrite, that in a great number of cases he is entirely unaware of his hypocrisy. There are two men here, not one ; if you like, the good man and the bad man, but I would prefer to say the idealist and the practical man. When he is

THEORY OF DOUBLE SELF

singing hymns or preaching brotherly love, John Jones has no knowledge of the other John Jones who talks about "the struggle for existence" with "every man for himself and the devil take the hindmost." In the same way, this other John Jones is quite unaware of the ideals that the religious John Jones has just been upholding.

When we get one stage further in this division between rival selves of a man or woman, we reach the cleptomaniac, the person with a passion for stealing, we come upon cases of double identity, such as the famous case given in Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, and many other cases which verge on insanity. Often the man who steals has actually no knowledge of his thieving when he is not engaged at it, and will tell you that it is a vice he detests above all others. In a case of double identity a man will suddenly leave his job or profession and without a word said, go out to seek his fortune in surroundings of a totally different kind. After years, maybe, he may suddenly regain his old self and come back, and not be able to account for his absence. One stage further still are the asylum cases, people normal for a while, who suddenly believe that they are the Prince of Wales, or Moses, or Shakespeare, or that they have committed some

THE MEANING OF DREAMS

awful crime or that they are tremendously rich, and in each case, act accordingly. It is extremely interesting to remember that Stevenson's novel was based on a vivid dream of his own; and the truth about Stevenson's life has recently been made public, showing that the pious and earnest Dr. Jekyll of, say, the *Prayers* and *Virginibus Pueris-que* was beset by a Dr. Hyde of intemperance and indecent rhyming, and that Henley and others of his friends were disgusted by what they took to be his hypocrisy, when as Dr. Jekyll he laid down standards of conduct for them to follow.

Now all these examples of double-self are alike in this, that they show that there is a conflict in the man or woman's nature between different ideas or interests. For the so-called hypocrite I have already suggested an explanation, a conflict between practical interests and the spiritual life. The kleptomaniac is a man divided between two ideas, the first that he wants things that are not his, the second that it is wicked to steal. To quote a typical case of double identity; a man who after a long life as a clerk in an office, married, in difficulties, with a loathing of his work and a longing for a gay life, yet feeling that he must stick it out because of his family, suddenly can stand it no longer, joins a circus and forgets all about his

THEORY OF DOUBLE SELF

past life. There has been conflict here between a desire to escape and feeling that he ought to stay, and after a time the desire to escape wins ; but the circus clown self has no knowledge of the self who is an office clerk with family ties.

The question arises : Why do we forget ? What is the meaning of forgetting ? Briefly, this is Dr. Rivers' suggestion, that when we are up against a problem that has two possible ways out, we try either one way or the other ; it is necessary for the success of our attempt that there should be no uncertainty in our minds while we are taking the particular course we have decided upon, therefore, we forget about the other. Whenever we are faced by a problem of this sort, and it happens every day, sometimes many times a day, we split up two selves, each self standing for one of these opposing courses of action, and we then behave as the hypocrite or as the kleptomaniac or as the madman, though not of course in so strikingly peculiar and sensational a way. All instances of absence of mind are due to conflict of this sort, all cases of inconsistent or strange behaviour. The " morbid case " is merely one where the conflict is more intense. The so-called " unconscious self," then, is not the sort of primitive bogey that people think, but is just the self which in conflict happens at the time to be beaten.

THE MEANING OF DREAMS

Having put this idea of double-self in a way, I hope, that can be accepted, I am now anxious to show how dreams come into the plan. *When a person is in a conflict between two selves, and one self is stronger than the other throughout the waking life, the weaker side becomes victorious in the dream.* I could quote a hundred cases of this happening. So long as the waking life is ruled by one interest or view at the expense of the other the defeated interest will appear in one form or another in every dream dreamed. Here are several at random.

Suppose that a reformed drunkard who has had a stern struggle between his desire to drink and a sense of pride that he has signed the pledge, kept sober for several months, and earned good money, meets one evening with an old friend at the public house door. The old friend jeers ; "Are you too proud to drink with me now, eh ? " The reformed drunkard says to himself " A small one wouldn't hurt," then pulls himself together with dignity, calls his old friend a cad for jeering and a villain for his drunken habits, then goes home for a cup of cocoa with his wife. But in his dreams the drink habit wins ; he finds himself in fancy being introduced to a very disagreeable man with a badly folded umbrella, a deacon's hat, a lot of boisterous children and a wife who is singing " Boys of the Bull-dog

THEORY OF DOUBLE SELF

Breed" in a voice like a gramophone. "My name," says this man, "is Mr. Cadville; come into the inn and have a drink. A small one wouldn't hurt." "I don't mind if I do," says the dreamer, "for I've a fine thirst." They go into the public house together; the wife and children stay outside. The old friend is there carrying round glasses of beer. There is a merry fire, clean sawdust on the floor; a few friends are playing darts and talking about football. Everything is jolly, the beer goes down merrily. The dreamer stretches out his hand for his drink, but Mr. Cadville says "No, my dear friend. Remember your pledge." "*I will* drink," says the dreamer and drinks—a nasty sticky sweet drink of cocoa. And wakes up in disappointment.

There are two or three things to be noticed here; the dream tells us a good lot that did not appear in the story. There are some good points about the public house that the man misses; he misses the football talk and the big fire (at home he has to be careful about coal) and the dart playing, at which he is a good hand, and most of all he is glad to be there away from his noisy children. His wife since his taking of the pledge, has done her best to make home happy for him, and succeeded; but though he appreciates what she has done and shows his gratitude,

THE MEANING OF DREAMS

the old fight is not over. All the dislike he is trying not to feel for his new life comes out in the dream ; and Mr. Cadville stands for this dislike. Why *Cadville* ? Now, the human brain plays very strange tricks in dreams, tricks which seem ridiculous and impossible when we wake up ; but I must ask you to accept the name *Cadville* as having come about in this way. He had called his old friend a cad and a villain for his behaviour at the tavern door and so when in the dream the drinking self re-appeared, the words *cad* and *villain* were applied by it to the sober self represented by Mr. Cadville. *Cadville* moreover is a mixture of two household names in the cocoa world, and since the dreamer had been given cocoa at home instead of beer, Mr. Cadville took that name and was dressed like the popular caricature of a pussyfoot. Mr. Cadville's wife and children were the dreamer's own wife and children in caricature and the wife sang in the gramophone voice as a symbol of all the petty disagreements in the dreamer's home. In order to make home life attractive, she had bought her husband a gramophone ; they could not afford many records, and " Boys of the Bulldog Breed " was one which the dreamer hated but which his wife liked extremely well and was always putting on the gramophone.

Such is the typical method of the so-called

THEORY OF DOUBLE SELF

“nonsensical” dream. The reverse of this drink dream would be one that appears when a man has been getting disgusted with his own drunken habits, perhaps the same man before his reformation. The night before he signed the pledge he is likely to have seen in a dream his dead mother standing before him, with one hand solemnly pouring out a glass of beer upon the floor, and with the other pointing to the grim gates of a pauper asylum to which drink had taken her husband. The drunkard is likely to have put this dream in a higher class than mere dreams, and called it a vision, but between dreams and visions, even when these take place in broad daylight, the difference seems to me to lie only in this that the vision is an experience of a kind that impresses the person who has it more than the mere dream or day-dream.¹

Another unhappily common variety of dream is one that follows the death of someone we

¹ There is perhaps one kind of vision that should not be regarded as a dream but as an event of waking life, that is when the visionary witnesses events that happened where he is standing many hundreds of years before. Such occasions are rare but often well supported by evidence; the famous gold armour in the treasure room of the British Museum was discovered at Mold in Flintshire through a vision of this kind. Personally, I am not surprised by such happenings or not much more surprised than when recently I heard an early phonographic record of Robert Browning's voice reciting some lines of his own verse; or when I still more recently saw a cinematograph film of King Edward VII's funeral. In both of these cases the illusion of the past invading the present quite mastered me. The mechanics of nature may surely produce as strong an illusion under favouring conditions and upon a sensitive imagination?

THE MEANING OF DREAMS

love ; it may take various forms, the most usual being the one of which we read in Milton's sonnet when he dreamed of his dead wife—his "late espoused saint," he called her—he tried to clasp her, but she vanished as he awoke. What must have happened in Milton's case was that there was conflict between the Milton who said "I must live alone now, my beloved wife is dead," and the other that said, "No, I cannot live alone. I need her, or another like her." The I-must-live-alone Milton won in the day ; at night got beaten, and the wife returned. Milton, it may be noticed, married three times. The painful cases in which bereaved people go half-witted with grief are due to the tie being so strong that the side which usually only appears at night appears in the day too ; they see the dead ones constantly at their side, talk with them, act as if they were still alive. It is noteworthy that such people often tell you as a ridiculous oddity that they have dreamed of the death of this dear one ; so the side usually beaten in the night has been winning there, at any rate.

Polar explorers when short of food are always having dreams of wonderful banquets interrupted as soon as started. The desire to eat has to be kept under very strict control during the waking hours, there is in fact a conflict between the self that wants to gobble up a week's rations

THEORY OF DOUBLE SELF

at a sitting or turn back to the supply ship instead of going forward, and the self that is concerned for the honour and safety of the party. The dream of the interrupted banquet is a complaint of the hungry self that it never gets enough to satisfy its hunger. In the recent British Antarctic Expedition, as Mr. R. E. Priestly, one of the members, told Dr. Rivers, the desire for food was sometimes but seldom satisfied in these dreams. Several members of his party had dreams in which they imagined that there was a shop behind the hut in which they were living which they had only to visit in order to obtain ample supplies of food. The dreamer would make his way out of the hut by the same laborious means as those necessary in real life, only to find on reaching the shop, that it was early closing day.¹ Dr. Rivers does not comment on those cases in which the hunger was satisfied in the dream, but according to our theory of conflict such dreams could only have followed a day when despair and hunger had not been under the usual strict control,

¹ Lest I should be thought to have said there that all the dreams mentioned in the Bible are always interpreted as prophetic, and not sometimes expressing an unsatisfied longing, I must quote Isaiah xxix. 8, where the dreams of hunger and thirst are clearly set out. "And it shall be as when a hungry man dreameth and behold he eateth; but he awaketh and his soul is empty; or as when a thirsty man dreameth and behold he drinketh; but he awaketh and behold he is faint and his soul hath appetite."

THE MEANING OF DREAMS

the dream being a reassurance that self-control would bring the party back to safety and plenty.

X Another common form of conflict is disappointed ambition ; a poet whose verses are despised by the critics and who in his waking life takes a modest attitude for fear of being ridiculed, is likely to dream at night that he is Shakespeare ; a man who is considered by his neighbours not to be so well bred as they, will dream that he is the Prince of Wales ; a man who considers himself more religious than his neighbours will allow, will dream that he is some famous saint in the Bible, or perhaps the Archbishop of Canterbury. It is such cases that have strengthened the popular opinion that " Dreams go by contraries." The asylums are full of people who are suffering from long standing and painful conflict between a belief in public opinion, on the one side, and, on the other, their own ambitions ; so that dreams of being Shakespeare, or John the Baptist, or the King become their daily life, and the miserable thought of their failure must be supposed to come to them only in the dreams of the night.

CHAPTER III
“PRIMITIVE” THOUGHT

CHAPTER III

“ PRIMITIVE ” THOUGHT

SUCH cases of conflict in dreams are numberless and in almost every case there will be found some queer example of the thinking in symbols which I have outlined in the case of Mr. Cadville. Most dreams are ridiculous not only in the sense that they are difficult to understand, but in the sense that they often depend on some pun, or jingle, or resemblance of two objects, with which the ordinary commonsense person who has these dreams would not in waking life have much sympathy. I say “ most dreams ” purposely, because it is held by Dr. Rivers, and I agree, that there are two main kinds of dreams according to whether one is sleeping lightly or not. Dreams dreamed when one is sleeping lightly are the ones nearest to our ordinary way of thinking and acting ; there is less of the odd impossible nightmare changing in them ; and indeed it is possible in light sleep to think very clearly and actually to solve all sorts of problems that have remained over from yesterday. Every good business man “ sleeps on ” a proposition

THE MEANING OF DREAMS

and in the light sleep just before waking often gets his solution quite plainly. Dreams of deeper sleep are often so absurd and muddled when remembered that they sound like madness ; but it is now widely held that such dreams which go in the way that young children think and talk, though not necessarily concerned with childish problems, have their own sense and order and method and are not to be despised.

The worst cases in the madhouse are those in which the patient is in such a deep sleep that nobody can make any sense of his utterances. From a study of dreams it is now possible to understand cases of insanity that hitherto seemed hopeless : and knowledge is half way though, indeed, not more than half way to a cure. We can be confident that Shakespeare's lines about the " tale told by an idiot full of sound and fury, signifying nothing " are not any longer justified. As well say that we are the idiots for not understanding him, this is no more untrue ; the idiot is genuinely and rightly furious with somebody or something, but we have no clue to the sympathy which he is demanding when he pours his aggrieved tale into our logically-tuned ears.

The main difference between dreams of light sleep and dreams of deep sleep is apparently in the use of symbols. In our daily conversation

PRIMITIVE THOUGHT

we often use symbols ; we say, " I smell a rat," or " We have got a long way to travel yet," or " Now we are coming to the turning point," or " This business is just hanging in the balance," but we do not see these symbols as *pictures*, or only in the vaguest way. Indeed there was nothing extraordinary in the famous remark of the Irish Member of Parliament : " I smell a rat, I see it floating in the air, but I will nip it in the bud." These were, to him, expressions calling up no pictures. In dreams, however, these symbols *are* seen as pictures. If, for instance, there was conflict in my mind between my desire to do a deal with Mr. Brown, a business acquaintance, and a feeling which in waking life I smothered, that he was not quite honest, in my dream I would be quite likely to see an Indian trying to make me buy a puppy. I would tell him " But I don't like it : it's only a puppy, and it's much too crooked for me." And he would answer, " No, look, it's quite an old dog and absolutely square," and for the moment I would see the dog getting an aged look and its body getting squarer and squarer. Then I would suddenly smell a disgusting smell. " What is that," I would ask. " Is it a dead rat ? " " No," he would reply, " it's nothing." I would buy the dog and take it home and suddenly discover it was only a pup after all

THE MEANING OF DREAMS

and as crooked as an eel. This dream would be a play on the name *Brown* which would produce the Indian, especially if I had ever used the expression *white* man to mean a man who is honest. The expressions to *sell a man a pup* (that is deceive him) and to *smell a rat*, would also be here: and the words "square" and "crooked" having the same sense of honest or dishonest would complete the picture. In dreams of light sleep I would be likely to dream quite simply that Mr. Brown tried to deceive me in the actual business which I was worrying about.

Another of the differences between these two kinds of dream is, that in the dreams of light sleep there is a sense of time and space and probability which the dreams of deep sleep have not got: this is because when we are using symbols it is impossible to keep to the strict rules of time and space and probability which govern our logical thinking. In looking at the caricatures in the *Evening News* or *Daily Mail* of John Citizen dressed in ridiculous clothes, being pushed over a cliff into the sea, or struggling uphill with an enormous load of taxes, or being eaten by a dragon called "Officialdom" or "Socialism," we do not ask the question "Is this possible?", or if we see a caricature of Papyrus or Mr. Lloyd George or

PRIMITIVE THOUGHT

some other ambassador of England, sailing over to America in a boat with people cheering on both sides, it does not strike us that the ex-Premier or Papyrus is too big for the boat or that the boat is too big for the sea, or that several days elapse between the send-off from England and the welcome in America. For these are symbols, ones that can easily be recognised. The caricaturist thinks in the dream way ; the idea of waste he gives in a leaking cistern ; the Geddes axe, probably used by Sir Eric without any definite picture in his mind, was drawn and introduced into a hundred different cartoons, the edge sharp or blunted according to the politics of the cartoonist.

In dream-caricatures the dreamer often sees himself as part of the caricature, and stands outside the picture as a looker-on ; unless this point is realized the dream is often unnecessarily difficult to interpret. There are further complications in the dream use of symbols ; if they were as simple and as carefully labelled as the caricatures one sees in the newspapers, there would never have been any need for a science of interpretation, but they are often the condensation and dramatisation of an enormous range of experience and the proper names that occur are the running together of two or more words to form one, as in the name Cadville,

THE MEANING OF DREAMS

words perhaps seen by chance in yesterday's newspaper. Lewis Carroll's *Jabberwocky* ballad in *Alice Through the Looking Glass* is a good instance in literature of this running-together ; an interpretation is given at the end of the story and we are told, if I remember rightly, that the adjective *slithy* is a mix-up of *slimy* and *lithe*, and that the verb to *gimble* is a mix-up of *nimble* and *gimlet*.

In dreams of deep sleep, not only are words run together but people are run together in the same way ; and also places. It is a common experience in dreams to meet a friend who is two or three people in one and whose actions and opinions stand for those of the group formed by these people ; and to meet this friend in a scene which is a mixture of two or three places known to the dreamer and which represents the whole area affected by the conflict or solution contained in the dream. On other occasions the person or the place changes character suddenly and completely, for reasons that will appear in the discussion of the " Captain " dream that follows. Sometimes the person or place is quite indefinite, where no particular stress is laid on their detailed character ; for instance in a dream of being married, in a general sense, and having children, also in a general sense, the dreamer will often have with

PRIMITIVE THOUGHT

him what seem at the time to be a real wife and real children yet who, when he comes to remember the dream, have had no personal details about them at all. It is important to notice that in many cases where unnatural passion is suspected by the Freudians to underlie a dream, the dream is quite innocent. Such a dream for instance as that of marrying one's grandmother is not likely to be a purposed breach of the laws laid down in the tables of kindred and affinity, but merely a symbolic way of representing a marriage with someone much older than oneself, as the popular saying is, in fact, "old enough to be his grandmother." Marrying one's aunt, again, might stand for making the same sort of marriage as the uncle did ; with someone in such and such a financial position, or with certain qualities such as good housekeeping, or with certain defects such as a sharp tongue.

Dr. Rivers in his *Conflict and Dream*, gives a vivid account of a dream in which the dreamer was as it were standing outside himself, and not only that, but had also divided himself into two alternating selves to represent the conflict which was tearing him. The dream is further a good example of condensation and though no Jabberwocky occurs in this account, the other dreams quoted in the same book are full of it.

"I can now turn to the dream by means of

THE MEANING OF DREAMS

which I propose to illustrate these processes of the dream-work. It is a dream of one of my patients, a medical man with the rank of captain in the R.A.M.C., who had served in France. This service, and especially certain experiences centring round the death of a French prisoner who had been mortally wounded during his escape from the German lines, had given him such a horror of medical practice that he was extremely reluctant to return to the practice of his profession. His relatives, and especially his wife's people who came from Canada, unaware of the real motives of this reluctance, were using all their influence to induce him to return to medical practice. Shortly before the dream he had talked over the whole situation with me, and I had suggested that he should take up "Public Health," where he would rarely, if ever, be subjected to experiences which would recall the horrors of his war service. A few days later he sent me an account of the dream by which I propose to illustrate the nature of the processes of symbolisation and dramatisation.

THE "SUICIDE" DREAM

I give this dream in the form in which it was recorded for me by my patient, whom I will call "Captain."

"I was seated in the front of the stalls at the

PRIMITIVE THOUGHT

Golders Green Empire. I was to give a speech on 'The Present Struggle.' I felt extremely nervous, as I was of two minds on the subject on which I had to speak. You were on the stage with me when I mounted it, and everybody I knew and had known seemed to be there. Gathering courage, I commenced: 'Ladies and Gentlemen, I desire to address you on "The Present Struggle."' Even as I started speaking I noticed that the seat I had just left was occupied by a man, though I had not seen him come in. I felt compelled to address myself to this man in particular. He appeared to be a stranger to me, yet there was something familiar about him. He looked like a Viking, that is, so far as his complexion, hair and eyes were concerned. I mean that his eyes shone fiercely blue and his hair seemed luminous gold.

"I resumed: 'We must continue the struggle to the last man. Better let us die than lose our manhood and independence and become the slaves of an alien people.'

"The man in the seat seemed to become intensely depressed as I said these words. Yet, though he approved, my words seemed to arouse some dissent in other parts of the hall, and it was then that I noticed that there were two stewards, one at each exit. The steward on my left was a Canadian with the face of my father-in-law,

THE MEANING OF DREAMS

and the man on my right was Dr. X, wearing his post-mortem apron and gloves. I continued pointing out how everything depended upon our putting out our mightiest fight. The man in my chair cheered and his eyes shone.

“ ‘Silence there,’ threatened the Canadian, ‘or I’ll deal with you,’ as he glanced at the man in my chair. ‘I’ll give you a taste of this,’ and he held up a stick towards the man. Then I noticed that a snake was crawling up the stick and it seemed to menace the man in my seat. I was filled with horror, and then I noticed that the man in my chair had changed. As he looked at the Canadian his eyes became dark and filled with infinite suffering and he seemed to be almost another person, for his hair had become dark and his skin was no longer fair. He so affected me that I became less confident. ‘I know,’ I said, ‘that we have suffered and are all suffering dreadful agony.’ At this the man in my chair, still dark in eye and face, groaned aloud in agony.

“ ‘What rest peace would bring us all,’ I continued. The man’s eyes now showed such agony that I felt it would be merciful if I killed him immediately, and Dr. X seemed to read my thoughts, for he smiled. ‘I’ll deal with him,’ shouted the Canadian, and putting his stick with the snake down, he held up a lady’s corset and

PRIMITIVE THOUGHT

cried : ' I've a straight waistcoat for him.' Here you interposed from the platform saying, ' Order there. Let the man alone. Go on, Captain. The fellow is ill, very ill.'

" Taking courage I went on, telling them that despite our intense suffering we must go on. ' There must be no surrender. We must not give in.' Again the man in my seat became a different being. His stature seemed to increase. Again his eyes seemed to shine blue fire, his hair was of gold and he cheered aloud. This enraged the Canadian at the exit and he again lifted the stick with the snake writhing on it. ' I'll give him a taste of this,' he shouted, and the man in my chair seemed to shrink. Again he was suffering dreadfully and I could not bear to see it. His eyes showed such agony that I felt I must kill him. Dr. X smiled grimly and approvingly, then interposed, saying that the man was so ill. I said : ' I'll put him out of his misery,' and took up a revolver which lay on the table. ' He won't feel it,' I said, ' there will be no blood and he will stop breathing at once.' ' Don't do it,' you said, ' the man is ill, but he will get well.' I could no longer stand the look in the man's eyes and determined to shoot. I was just raising the revolver when I heard the voice of my son saying, ' Don't do it, daddy, you'll hurt me too.'

THE MEANING OF DREAMS

"I woke feeling ill and very depressed. It seemed very terrible and was the worst dream I ever had in my life."

I knew the patient so well that I was able to interpret nearly every feature of the dream at once. From boyhood the patient had wished that he had been fair and had had blue eyes, and this wish, combined with the fact that the man occupied his seat in the audience left no doubt whatever in my mind that the man in the patient's chair was the dream-substitute of the patient himself. We can with confidence interpret the dream-experiences of the man in the audience as those of the patient. I recognised at once that the Canadian who had the face of his father-in-law represented his wife's people, and that the stick with the snake first creeping up it and then writhing round it was a symbol of medicine, with which his wife's people were, in fact, threatening him. Dr. X, the guardian of one of the exits of the hall, was a friend of the dreamer who had recently committed suicide, whence his approval of the resolve of the patient to shoot the man in the audience. As this man was the dream-surrogate of the patient, the shooting, if it had taken place, would have been a dream homicide symbolising an act of suicide, the suicidal nature of the act being disguised by the transformation of the dream in which the

PRIMITIVE THOUGHT

patient was represented by the man in the audience.

The voice of the sleeper's child in the dream represented the element in the conflict arising out of the social sentiment whereby a suicide inflicts a stigma upon those he leaves behind him.

The attitude towards the corset waved before the man in the audience undoubtedly represents the relation of the dreamer towards his wife, but the record of the dream leaves the exact nature of this relation doubtful. The eyes of the man again become blue and his skin fair after the incident of the corset, but it is doubtful whether this change was directly due to the waving of the corset, or to the nature of the speech which the dreamer was making. The comparison of the corset with a straight-waistcoat points to one aspect at least of the dreamer's attitude towards his wife being one of antagonism. It is probable that the doubtful character of the interpretation only reflects the ambivalent attitude of the patient towards his wife, his love for her being blended with antagonism due, at any rate in part, to her being one of the forces driving him back to the practice of medicine.

The speech of the dreamer was a direct indication of a conflict which I knew to be actively present between manifest opinions that the war must be fought to a finish and deeper feelings

THE MEANING OF DREAMS

that a struggle involving such horrors as those which he had experienced should not continue. At the same time, there can be little doubt that it was also a symbolic expression of the conflict between desire to continue the work of his profession and horror at the thoughts which the practice of his profession, even in the modified form I had recommended, would inevitably arise.

Among incidents of the dream which were readily explained by my knowledge of the patient I may mention the stress laid on the expression of agony in the eyes of the man in the audience, which was derived from a special feature of the experience with the dying French prisoner to whom I have already referred. The choice of the revolver for the suicide and the mention of the absence of blood and the fact that breathing would stop at once were also referable to this experience. The mention of the rest brought by peace and Dr. X's use of the words "Angel of Peace" as an expression for "death" show clearly that the speech about the war symbolised his own struggle, with the desire for death as its end.

The two means of exit from the hall may be taken to represent the two alternative solutions of his conflict, which at the moment seemed possible; one, the return to medicine, sym-

PRIMITIVE THOUGHT

bolised by his father-in-law with his stick and snake; the other, suicide, symbolised or represented by a person who had recently committed this act.

The impression received by the dreamer as he was beginning his speech that everyone he knew or had ever known was there, may be taken as an expression of the thought that the act then prominent in the dreamer's thoughts was one which, through the publicity attendant upon suicide, would become as prominent in the minds of all those he knew or had ever known as at the moment his place on the platform of the dream made him prominent to all those present.

This is not the place to consider the practical or the prospective value of this dream, but I may say in passing that I have never known a dream which had more important practical consequences. I was convinced at once that the mere thought of returning to medicine, even in the modified form I had suggested, was so painful to the patient that he was contemplating suicide. When he visited me at my request I was doubtful at first whether simply to act on his conclusion without revealing my grounds for advising that he should renounce all thoughts of return to medicine, or whether I should go into the situation with him fully. A short conversation soon made it clear that he had been enter-

THE MEANING OF DREAMS

taining definite thoughts of suicide, thoughts which had been strengthened, if not suggested, by the recent suicide of his friend, Dr. X, whose rôle in the dream it was to encourage its transformed suicide. I went into the whole situation carefully with the patient, and it was decided that he should give up all thoughts of medicine and enter upon some other career."

Why do some problems occur as dreams in deep sleep and some in light? The only answer I can give to this is not really an answer but a suggestion that the same subject is very likely treated in both kinds of thought and that the mind goes from the imaginative method of thought followed by children and savages to the more strictly logical method followed by the civilized man, according to the needs of the body for deep or light sleep which must be supposed to restore it in a different degree. The question then to be asked is not "Why do some problems occur as dreams in deep sleep and some in light?" but "Why do we sometimes remember the dreams of light sleep more easily than those of deep sleep, and why is it sometimes the other way about?" A distinction can be made between cases where in waking life we are aware to a certain extent of the conflict we are in, but cannot find a solution, and cases in

PRIMITIVE THOUGHT

which we have only a vague unrest or gloom, with no knowledge as to what sort of conflict is going on, or indeed any knowledge that life is not really running quite normally. In cases of the first sort where the waking-self is anxious to end the conflict, if it can see a way out, dreams of a direct kind are likely to be remembered. But in the other cases where there is no recognition between the conflicting selves, dreams of a direct kind will continue to be forgotten. As for dreams of a symbolic kind, whether these are remembered or not depends not only on the knowledge we have of the conflict in question, but also on our attitude of welcome or scorn for " illogical " experience. If we have no use for fantastic dreams, if we neither save them up to enliven the breakfast table nor note them down at once for future interpretation, they are unlikely to be remembered ; on the other hand, there is no reason why they should not be remembered if the waking self is interested or amused by them, so long as the waking self does not at once understand their sense.

That dream interpreters like Dr. Rivers can ever discover what is wrong with a patient is due to the waking self being able to recall a dream for its absurdity or horror, without suspecting that the sense is a direct challenge to itself. It would at first sight seem from this

THE MEANING OF DREAMS

that it would be possible for anyone who has a general working knowledge of dreams to discover what is wrong with himself by recalling his fantastic dreams without trying to understand them, then noting them down securely, and lastly interpreting them at his leisure. As a matter of fact, if the conflict is a severe one he is sure while it lasts to miss the point of the symbols, which in future dreams will tend to grow more and more obscure, the greater his knowledge of their past meanings becomes. The deeper we burrow into our own minds, the farther these symbols retreat, becoming no longer well-known symbols, or even symbols of such symbols, but symbols of symbols. The attempt to overtake such knowledge is like chasing one's shadow from street lamp to street lamp. The further from the lamp behind the longer the shadow grows, the nearer to the next lamp the fainter it grows.

An objection to this line of argument might well be, "if you say that in dreams one can think in two different modes, the logical and the not-logical, why does the same not happen in waking life?" My answer to that is that this actually occurs, and not only in mental images but sometimes even finds expression in language. A good instance would be the example given in a University Logic text-book of a notorious

PRIMITIVE THOUGHT

breach of the rules, a typical *non sequitur*, as follows :—

“ Well is this place called Stony Stratford, for never was I so bitten by fleas in my life before.”

Here is a clear example of what is called “ associative thinking ” on the part of the unfortunate traveller, the point of departure from the logical expression being in the words “ stony ” and “ bitten.” It is a genuine cry of emotion, and in emotion logic sometimes gives place to this associative method of thought, the effect being the same condensation of the lengthy speech otherwise necessary, the same substitution of symbol for grammatical phrase, that we have noted in dreams. Had he felt only a little less bitter against the innkeepers of Stratford, he would have been able to control his speech into the following polite channels :—

“ Well is this place called Stony Stratford, for the landlords here have stony faces and stony hearts, and they have left me ‘ stony,’ as the saying goes ; and the discomfort of my bed ! I would have as lief lain out on the stones by the roadside, for there at all events, I would have been spared the fleas ! In truth, I have been badly ‘ bitten ’ in two senses, for they made me pay half-a-guinea for a blanket full of fleas and a mattress hard as stones ! ”

THE MEANING OF DREAMS

The more condensed version is exactly the equivalent in language of the method of thought in fantastic dreams, for which Logic has had for centuries nothing but the sneering patronage of the self-respecting citizen for the grotesque but cheerful village idiot. Here in the Stony Stratford joke we see how the remote meanings and associations of common words will play on each other in moments of passion, if by this interplay a short cut to expression is found. I admit that this not-logical method of thought seldom finds expression in conversation during waking life except in such moments as this, but romantic poetry is charged with it, and so are the asylums. Further, I hold that though it rarely finds expression in words, this method of thought nevertheless occurs very frequently in sane unpoetical waking life. Business men often attribute their success in complicated deals to this, that *they never think them out*. This is a common admission and an important one. What they mean is that they do not logically think out the arguments for and against a certain course of action. But I have found some scientific support for my view that they do think out these problems, though in a way that they would not call 'thinking,' that is, in the Stony Stratford method of thought, or the suicide dream method of thought, a very

PRIMITIVE THOUGHT

concentrated and vivid method from which action immediately springs, but of which they cannot afterwards give an account in the logical method. It is possible that women think in this way more than men, which has given rise to the odd theory that women are illogical and therefore stupid creatures.

The point is that the common-sense man nowadays and the common-sense woman find no sense at all in the emotional mode of thought based on remote associations of words and images ; and fantastic dreams are so out of touch with the hard logic of industrial life that though this mode of thought is of very frequent occurrence among hard headed, hatchet faced men and women, in day-dreaming between periods of business, in "instinctive" decisions during business, and every night in sleep (I hold that every man and woman dreams every night) yet they are unaware of its frequency and flatter themselves that this mode is a survival of infantile or primitive thought. In a civilized community, the nursery is the one place where there is an audience not too proud to appreciate ancient myths and so-called nonsense rhymes of greater or less antiquity, so if it does happen that we remember a dream or write a poem in which we afterwards discover

THE MEANING OF DREAMS

this emotional mode, we say we are going back to our childhood.

The sand bank on which modern dream interpretation has apparently grounded is then this question of the survival of the infantile or primitive. Even Dr. Rivers in his brilliant explanation of the suicide dream is content to record that the dream caricature of the doctor has yellow hair and blue eyes because the doctor as a child had always longed for hair and eyes of those colours. Why should this infantile wish recur? Dr. Rivers is content to say that because the mind is working in an infantile way the infantile memory will recur to provide this caricature of the man who is dreaming. I believe that the infantile or the primitive never survives as such into adult life. In this case, one of the dreamer's chief complications in the conflict was the fate of his child; the man in the audience may certainly have had yellow hair and blue eyes for the historic reason Dr. Rivers gives, but there is a further reason for the occurrence in the present situation; the ambition to go on with medicine and the war is being symbolised as at once childishness and a hopeless vanity. This also makes a convenient bridge for the symbolism that follows, the child's very proper ambition not to have a suicide for a father. Further, though the yellow

PRIMITIVE THOUGHT

hair and blue eyes suggest this childish memory, the man, we are told, looked like a Viking, and the popular associations with the word Viking are on the one hand this fair hair and flashing blue eyes, on the other their barbarous love of war; so the ambition to go on with the War is in this sense not only a childish vanity and a hopeless ambition, but also barbarity and an offence against civilization.

As with the infantile so with the primitive. The view that Jung and his followers hold is that the self that dreams is the primitive self, whom we inherit from our savage ancestors, in manners, morals and method of thought, untamed and unchanged, and who with a whole armoury of flint-knives, clubs and bull-roarers, is ready to leap up again as pure Savage as soon as the civilized adult loses control of himself in sleep or love or panic. It is time this view must go. We may assume that the associative, not-logical method of thought comes earlier in the history of the race and the individual than the intellectual logical method, but when it reappears in the later stages it does not appear either purely primitively or purely childishly. I cannot agree with the cynics who see no difference between the rite of the Sacrament as practised by high ecclesiastic dignitaries and the orgy of their cannibalistic

THE MEANING OF DREAMS

ancestors : yet I admit a historic connexion. In the same way I cannot agree either with those who assure me that I am reverting to my childhood when under the stress of a war-neurosis I weep under correction from a policeman or parent ; though certainly between ten years old and twenty-two years old there is no record of a similar display. In dreams it is true that imagery may be drawn from long forgotten nursery experience or from some primitive myth or history, but the savage or the child is no more re-appearing than he can be said to be reappearing when the writer on psychology deduces an argument from a similar memory, myth or history.

The theory of this childish survival has led the doctors of the Vienna school to ascribe to children the particularised passions of grown men and women ; the doctors of the Zurich school to ascribe to civilized man the particularised memory of a savage state enjoyed by his ancestors. Both of these ideas are due to the feeling that the not-logical associative mode of thought has no place in civilized life and is merely a survival of the child or the savage. A great advance from the scientific side on these theories of psychology is made by Dr. Rivers, but his admirable observations on the mechanism of dreams, especially admirable

PRIMITIVE THOUGHT

where he gives the history of the accompanying mechanism of the body, are disappointing where they do not allow that associative thought is as modern and reputable a mode as intellectual thought, regarding it as a rather useless survival like the human appendix or the tassel on an umbrella. That scientists should take this view is quite understandable because as scientists they are committed to logic as the most important method: I am perhaps fortunate in being equally attached to the logical method in scientific argument of this kind and to the not-logical method when I am reading or writing romantic poetry. Freud's theory of the Censorship which concerns the *disguising* of thought is likewise due to his prejudice that logic is the only reputable method of thought. If the not-logical associative method is given its due, the question of "disguise" does not arise: from the point of view of the associative method, the logical method is also a disguise. It is as though we called Charlie Chaplin's famous make-up a "disguise"; surely the Charlie Chaplin of the films is a character as reputable and legitimate as the Mr. Charles Chaplin of private life? The world-famous Charlie Chaplin would pass quite unrecognised in London streets if he disguised himself in Mr. Chaplin's smooth face, well fitting clothes and rather earnest

THE MEANING OF DREAMS

manner, but if he came in his proper form there would be a riot.

There are further points to be considered about "the primitive." It is commonly supposed that "primitive" life, thought and activity are not only inferior in quality to the civilized stages which follow them but also simpler and barer in their structure. In the case, however, of a three or four-year-old child learning to think as his parents think, will anyone seriously maintain that the innumerable and baffling problems of classification and co-ordination that this child has to face, do not make intellectual demands which would stagger and even destroy a grown person who was set a task of such radical novelty ; the grasping, for the first time, for instance, of the meaning of Time, Death, Cause and Effect ? As for the primitive savages ; to take a people whose life is at first sight the narrowest and most meagrely furnished of any in the world, the Esquimaux. They have a language of such grammatical complexity and rigidity that its only rivals in this respect, of known languages, are others of similar primitive antiquity, Chinese and Sanskrit ; to learn Esquimaux well takes a man about the time it would take him to learn any four unrelated modern European languages. From the civilized point of view, life in a primi-

PRIMITIVE THOUGHT

tive tribe is simpler than life in modern civilization, its possibilities easily exhausted, but so at first sight is a game like chess—a “ primitive ” game—where the pieces are set with more rigidity than in the game of life ; but are the possibilities of chess anything like exhausted yet ? Civilization is a widening but not necessarily a deepening force ; this is reflected in the limited languages of commerce, pidgeon English in China, and trade Esquimaux. The scientists of our civilization may classify a few hundred thousand varieties of the world’s living creatures, but they do not emulate the ancient Indians who concentrating on the naked human body were at pains to classify its eight million different meditative postures. A big modern novel like James Joyce’s *Ulysses* may sweep across the face of contemporary life in a searching and informative fashion, but can it compete with the Sanskrit poet’s *tour de force*, that of combining in a single poem concurrently two separate sacred epics, by using throughout words capable of a double interpretation ? It is as though one were asked to tell the story of the *Pilgrim’s Progress* in such a way that it might be equally well read as the story of Joseph and his Brethren. We must afford to respect the primitive more than we do at present.



CHAPTER IV
VARIETIES OF DREAMS

CHAPTER IV

VARIETIES OF DREAMS

I HAVE been principally discussing dreams of conflict hitherto, but fortunately life is not all conflict, it has its moments of peace and harmony, and where there is a sense of harmony in the waking life we must expect it in the dream life which is running side by side with it. A fine example of a dream of harmony, that is, a dream in which there is no conflict, I found recently in the *Spectator*. The writer is talking about the new cure for diabetes, insulin. He says :—

“It is the nearest thing that has yet been discovered to the elixir of life. On Saturday I had two injections, and on Sunday morning I found that I was standing up, without giving it a thought, to shave. It was probably the first time for five years that I had done anything standing up which I might have done sitting down. I no longer felt ‘as if I had been born a hundred degrees below par.’ I felt sociable, responsive, and clubbable again. . . . It is difficult to describe

THE MEANING OF DREAMS

the sense of well being and escape after the first few injections. One of my early Insulin dreams is to the point. . . . This dream was of a coach in which I ought to have been a passenger, but for some reason I had dropped out. I seemed to have been running behind it for an eternity, and had given up all hopes of catching it up, though it was a question of life and death. Then at last I saw the long white road far ahead of me as clearly as in a map, with a hairpin bend in it which would bring the coach to within a hundred yards of where I stood. I had only to follow an easy path across a common and it would meet me and pick me up."

The writer ends by saying that though in his dream he remembers no signpost where the short cut left the high road, if there had been one the inscription would have been "*Insulin: This Way to Health and Efficiency.*" Dreams of harmony may appear either directly or symbolically and are regulated by the same general principles as dreams of conflict. The only difference will be found in the effect of the dream on the waking life. If the dream is one of harmony there is no reason for it to be misunderstood by the waking self; even if there is no translation made of it into logical

VARIETIES OF DREAMS

terms action may spring directly from the recollection. If the dream be one of conflict, though the best interpreter of it in its particular references will be the dreamer himself, yet *it will only be when conflict is over that he can understand its full meaning.*

There are, of course, some people unusually quick and sympathetic who can often tell in outline what a dream is about, but even these are often wrong where an unusual symbol is used. For instance, a snake, particularly a snake in the grass, is usually a symbol of a friend's treachery, but a snake-charmer or a schoolboy who keeps pet snakes and understands them might have dreams in which they stand for just the opposite, and in the "Captain" dream the snake was certainly a symbol of medicine. Still, as a general rule one can make out a list of the broad meanings of dreams for any given country or society. For example, if anyone dreams that he is walking about without clothes on, a common dream, it usually means that the dreamer has done something that he is ashamed of, and is afraid of what the neighbours will say. To float easily about with the feet only just touching ground will symbolise freedom where that is lacking in the waking life. Sometimes one rides a winged horse: wings are a symbol of freedom,

THE MEANING OF DREAMS

as in the well-known phrase "Oh that I had the wings of a dove," so is swimming (especially in the sea, which is often itself a symbol of freedom) though as in the phrase "I am quite in the swim," swimming may stand for being on good terms with new neighbours. So the old dream manuals are not to be entirely despised after all.

Professor Jung of Zurich, whose name I mentioned in connection with Freud's, has a theory that certain fixed symbols occur in the dream life of all civilized peoples. These, he says, are the same symbols which our savage ancestors once used in religious ceremonies, these ceremonies being principally concerned with the exercise of the passions. He claims that the dreamer inherits these fixed symbols in the same way that he inherits other powers, qualities or instincts from his ancestors. There is no particular reason to object to this theory on the ground that a particular image used in the past may not occur to the mind by other channels than the usual ones of education and history. As I suggest elsewhere, occasional visions or dreams repeat with surprising accuracy past events at which the dreamer was not present and of which he has not even been historically informed.

On the other hand, a memory or a vision of

VARIETIES OF DREAMS

the past is not the past itself, and there is no reason to expect such ancient symbols as Jung supposes to exist not to change their significance according to the place and time at which they re-appear. Then too, symbols used by primitive peoples vary enormously between tribe and tribe : the ancestry of a well-mixed people like the English-speaking nations is not at all harmonious in its use of symbols. The symbolism for instance of left hand or right to denote unlucky or lucky, morally good or bad, does not apply at all in those Celtic fringes of the British Isles where East and West, North and South have until recently been solely used to show direction : it will be still said for instance in some parts of Scotland and Ireland that the match box is " east of the candle." Moreover, Dr. Rivers quotes a dream in which the question of going to the left or the right occurred, but there is no question that " Right " and " Left " did not in this case mean " good " and " bad," the dream not being concerned with moral questions, but that these words were being used in their political sense of Conservative and Radical, a movement towards the left in this dream signifying a protest against the Conservative view, towards the end of the war, that Germany must be utterly crushed ; the dreamer wished to return to civil life in which as a

THE MEANING OF DREAMS

scientist he had friendly relations with Germans, and if there *was* any moral sense in left and right in this dream, the conventional symbols were reversed. It can be shown that the principal symbols on which the Jung claim rests, where they do occur in the sense laid down for them, occur every one of them in some phrase or other of the language there spoken, or in a Biblical context, or in well-known poems or familiar pieces of art, and especially in the widely circulated writings of these psychologists themselves ; so that before believing these symbols hereditary it would be as well to discover in each case whether they are not drawn directly from the dreamer's direct and personal experience.

A dream book rather on superstitious lines has recently been published by Lady Trelwall. She holds to the theory of fixed symbols and has illustrated it by saying in one passage that among her acquaintances she has found a general admission that to dream of mushrooms means a christening coming soon in the dreamer's family. Now, a mushroom springing up in the night, tender, white, smooth and unopened, to be swelled by the early dews is a very pretty symbol of a baby's approach to the font ; the religious mysteries of the birth of the human soul and of the christening ceremony would be well

VARIETIES OF DREAMS

symbolised by the mysterious appearance both of these most baffling vegetables and of the dew with which Heaven baptises them : to gather mushrooms into a basket further suggests gathering souls into the Christian commonwealth. It is not, of course, so difficult to prophesy a christening as, say, a death by drowning or the eruption of a volcano ; the ceremony usually follows naturally a week or two after birth, and the news of a birth especially in one's own family is generally no news.

As for the claim that a number of acquaintances have all hit on the same piece of symbolism, there is no reason to dispute this so long as there is a close bond of interests within the circle. It is a commonplace that among friends the same idea or image will often occur to several minds at once without any apparent communication between them : this is usually called " telepathy " but to me means little more than that the minds of the members of a group are working together as a single group-mind and not as a number of separate ones. Again, the symbolic connexion between mushrooms and christenings once accepted, there is every reason to expect the dream of gathering mushrooms to occur whenever there are whisperings of a coming christening, and to be remembered wherever there is no objection on the part

THE MEANING OF DREAMS

of the waking self to this christening ; the same can be said of the most unlikely symbols in the old fashioned dream-manuals, which once accepted will be, as it were, stored by the imagination against future need.

Fear * Dreams are of an infinite variety, and only a few main types can be singled out for notice. One calling for particular attention is the dream in which we say to ourselves while still asleep, " It's only a dream," or perhaps " I can interpret this dream, it's meaning is clear to me." In both cases it would, I think, be untrue to suggest that the comment we make on the dream is not itself a dream. In fact, the meaning of the dream lies not only in the nightmare on which we are commenting, but in the comment too. *Anxiety* * In the first case the dream suggests that some problem or other that we have been worrying about during the day is not really worth worrying about, being founded on a mistaken idea ; in the second case, the dream-self claims to have found a solution to a problem, which the waking self either rejected or did not consider. Similarly the nightmare from which, knowing it is a nightmare, one tries to but cannot escape into the careless security of waking life, probably means that the waking self which has succeeded in laughing down some alarming news or prophecy as a " fantastic absurd dream " is now

VARIETIES OF DREAMS

being defeated ; this alarming possibility has recurred as a nightmare whose horror the dreamer cannot escape, however often he calls it " only a dream." It is likely that dreams of this type have been responsible for the widespread idea that the Reason, the controlling part of the mind, is struggling in sleep against a welter of meaningless fancies.

A familiar dream belonging to the same general group as the two or three I have just discussed, is the dream which often follows an exhausting and gloomy day. It is a dream of the purest exhilaration and joy in which there are no particularly remarkable features beyond a general sense of warm breezes and springtide, but the dreamer is repeating to himself " This is lovely, I mustn't wake up," " This is lovely, I mustn't wake up "—The usual view of this sort of dream is that it is simply the natural compensation in sleep for the distresses of waking life, but this view does not account for the frequency with which a gloomy and oppressive day is followed by a frightening and restless series of dreams. What dreams of this joyful kind really express is most likely a denial by the dream self of the view that the waking self has been holding, that life is a vale of tears, that it is at the best a restless sleep, at the worst a nightmare. The dream self points out that

THE MEANING OF DREAMS

life is worth living on the whole, that "If Winter Comes," Spring can hardly be far behind, even in the curiously mixed seasons that England has recently been enjoying. The dream is a statement of optimism, not yet founded on any particular hope, but on a general theory that when things get as bad as they can be, good fortune is liable to come back with a rush. This dream of course must have its pessimistic opposite.

Two other types of dream must not be neglected in this discussion, because popular interest is more centred in these perhaps than in any others ; the prophetic dream and the dream of events happening at a distance. The prophetic dream first. As I have pointed out, in ancient times it was usual to think all dreams prophetic, and this idea still persists among the people whom we call superstitious. The dream dreamed in conflict is quite likely to be prophetic where it comes in light sleep and is therefore not very unlike a waking experience, for where the dream self is giving the waking self a warning which this waking self chooses to disregard, the chances are that the warning is to some extent justified and the dream is therefore liable to come true.

Prophecy is often, of course, just another form of conflict and used as a weapon with

VARIETIES OF DREAMS

deadly and accurate effect by one suffering at the hands of another : prophecy of the death or shame of an enemy is likely to appear in the dream when, during the waking life, this enemy has seemed both unshamable and immortal. If the sufferer has in waking life lost his faith in Divine Justice, the prophetic dream of his enemy's overthrow will seem to be directly inspired by the Author of Divine Justice Himself or by His angels. Again, a dream that is symbolic may happen to come true literally ; a man may dream that his house collapses, the meaning of that dream being that he is afraid of a financial crash or a break-down in health ; his mind, however, has chosen this symbol of the house collapsing because he has at the back of his mind a feeling that it actually is insecure, but disregards that feeling since he cannot afford to have the walls repaired. To make a general statement about the prophetic dream : it is true that very often we dream of things that are going to happen and that they do happen, sometimes in all but very slight details, though sometimes in all but the most important detail. Dreams are not more prophetic in fact than waking life, in which we all do a certain amount of prophecy ; we say, for instance, " to-night we are going to a dance and So-and-so, and So-and-so, will be there, and

THE MEANING OF DREAMS

such-and-such a band will play certain tunes and the cakes will be of this or that kind ; and a sensible person from his knowledge of past dances can get very close to what actually happens, short of seeing the thing itself. Moreover our memory of a dream is not the same as the actual dream ; memory changes as much as life itself, so our memory of the prophetic vision is liable to be altered by our knowledge of the event after it has happened. Sometimes we make prophecies based on what seems flimsier ground for prophecy. " Mark my words," we say, " that boy will end on the gallows " or perhaps " in thirty years' time he will be Prime Minister." Sometimes we are right, usually wrong, but there are a few visionaries who can make sounder judgments than others of us, and therefore, I see no reason to disbelieve that the Bible prophets had prophetic dreams, or that these dreams often came true. Wherever prophecies on such " flimsy grounds " are frequently made in waking life, there is no reason why they should not appear in dreams, and it is possible that in a dream state, free from distraction, it may be easier to make a closer forecast of the future than when awake.

Much the same may be true of dreams where events are seen happening at a distance ; it is

VARIETIES OF DREAMS

true that we often have the same experience in waking life, a sudden feeling that someone we love is in danger or ill, and we act on this feeling. It is possible that the mind is more likely to have these experiences in a state of dream, but as this experience is not peculiar to dreams, there is no real need to account for particularly here.

This and many other questions about the nature of dreams do not seem so difficult if we take for granted that though in the dream-life the mind may be active in a very different way from its method during waking-life, these activities are none the less important. To take for granted that dreams are mere vain delusions will mean that any sense that we happen to find in them will have to be accounted for ; but to examine dreams with more respect is to make any apology unnecessary. If in dreams we even sometimes discover the mind active in a way that seems in part superior to that of waking life, this need cause us no surprise.



CHAPTER V

THE SURVIVAL OF THE PAST AND OTHER PROBLEMS



CHAPTER V

SURVIVAL OF THE PAST AND OTHER PROBLEMS

IT would be convenient to sum up again briefly in the light of the two foregoing chapters, the history of dream interpretation given at the beginning of the book. In the first place, then, an enormous importance was attached to dreams as being inspired by the gods and somehow symbolically foretelling the future ; next, the new movement of commonsense and logic, not being able to cope with dreams symbolic or otherwise, ruled them out of serious discussion ; among the not superstitious they became as despised as they had once been venerated, and dream manuals were written with less and less care. Now after centuries of neglect dreams are being widely studied again, but not so much for foretelling the future as for recording important parts of the dreamer's personal history which cannot otherwise be recognised ; and for dealing not with one particular kind of problem or emotion or experience but with as many problems, emotions, hopes, fears and other moods and experiences and interests as there are

THE MEANING OF DREAMS

in waking life, though by a method which can seldom be recognised at first sight by the dreamer when he wakes.

I am anxious to show that each of these past theories about dreams has been right up to a point. The people who found prophecy in dreams, as I have pointed out, were in many cases right in so doing, though to find only prophecy was wrong, and they were right in holding that many dreams are symbolic, though wrong in holding that dreams are always so. Those people who thought that most dreams are illogical were right up to a point ; dreams do not always go in the logical way of thought ; but to say that because dreams are not logical they are therefore valueless, that is wrong. Again to say that certain definite meanings can be attached to particular dream symbols is true up to a point ; certain meanings are usual, but they are not universal. To say, as Freud says, that dreams are concerned with passionate thoughts suppressed in waking life, is sometimes true, and in the cases with which Freud and his friends were dealing it may have been even the general rule, because they were looking for that sort of dream ; but to push this theory too far particularly if " the passions " are to mean only the one thing, is ludicrous.

Then the Bergsonian view about dreams

SURVIVAL OF THE PAST

being caused by exaggeration of certain sounds heard at night, or by the position in which one lies, or by moonlight or sudden lamplight or internal pains caused by pickled walnuts ; this view has truth in it, but stops short too soon. A friend of mine had a dream that he was grasping a dead hand ; in horror he tried to hurl it from him but it remained where it was. He awoke bathed in sweat, and found that it was his other hand which had gone to sleep because he was lying on it. This dream fits Bergson's case admirably, but the further question can always be put ; *why* does the mind exaggerate an experience in that particular way ? I hold that a reason will always be found in the dreamer's waking life for the form that this exaggeration takes. In the case I have given the interpretation was easy ; my friend has strong leanings towards Socialism, but his profession as architect threw him very much in contact with rich capitalists who asked him to do luxury-building for them. He undertook it because he needed the money, but he had a troubled conscience and this dream about the *dead hand* (*Mortmain*) which is a well-known symbol for inherited capital can be easily understood. The Socialist self conquered in his dream life and urged him in symbolism to throw away his connexion with

THE MEANING OF DREAMS

the dead hand of Capitalism at whatever cost to himself.

The same with the blobs of colour floating in our eyes, the noise of the wind, pickled walnuts, the scuffle of mice ; these may all be taken by the mind and exaggerated into vivid dreams, but the *form* that these dreams take is the point. Again, according to Bergson, the nurse went down the ward flashing her lantern in the patient's eyes, but every man had a different dream. Bergson and other members of what I might call the Pickled Walnut School would have explained the common dream of trying to run away from something dangerous or disgusting but finding it impossible to move a step, as being simply due to the bed-clothes hampering the movements of the legs which are, besides, unable to run while the body is lying in bed. *But why*, we may ask, *do such dreams occur* ? It is untrue to say that in sleep we cannot get out of bed and use our legs, for sleep-walking is a common habit ; and if the lying-position is held to explain this nightmare, how is it that it also produces the pleasant dreams of flying ? The answer is probably that as the flying dream is a symbol of freedom, so this nightmare is also a symbol, but a symbol, where in waking life one has boldly decided to escape from some dangerous or unhappy situation, of the hopeless-

SURVIVAL OF THE PAST

ness of this attempt. It seems clear then that though Bergson is right so far as he goes, yet any light seen, sound heard, or position adopted in sleep by the body may be twisted by the mind into a symbol of warning or encouragement, joy or terror, according to the needs of the occasion.

The same sort of question that has here been put to the " Pickled Walnut School " must be put to those who hold that it is sufficient to account for dreams by tracing them to some incident in the past ; we must always ask *why should this past incident crop up again in later life ?* As I have attempted to show, the past, as such, has no power over us ; present happenings may have a reference to the past, but once a man is grown up, the child that he was is long dead, once a nation is civilized its savage manners and customs do not recur in the old way. The principal confusion in modern dream interpretation has been caused by the view that the past in some way or other survives unchanged in a hiding place and takes over the mind while we sleep, and further that this reappearance of the past in dreams is either unnecessary or harmful to the present waking self. When this mistaken notion of the survival of the past disappears, as it has already showed signs of doing at the recent Psychological Congress at

THE MEANING OF DREAMS

Oxford, the science of dream-interpretation will enter on a new and certainly much more fruitful phase than the last.

Recently another friend of mine, a retired seaman, told me that he frequently has a nightmare of falling from the rigging of a man-of-war down to the deck below ; he gave as an explanation that he had seen so many fatal accidents of this kind while in the Navy that he still dreamed about it. That explanation is certainly true so far as it goes, and if my friend were still in the Navy or liable to serve again it would be quite enough. There would be a conflict in his mind between a self that said " It's dangerous, I don't want to do it. I might lose my life," and the self that said, " Nonsense. It has got to be done. Your honour is at stake, and besides, if you refuse to go aloft you'll be put in the cells and court-martialled." The courageous self wins by day ; the careful self wins at night. All that is simple. *But why should my friend have this dream when his service is over and he is safe ashore ?* The dream must now be symbolic of some other danger. The losing of his hold on the rigging and falling is likely to stand for a fear of losing his position in business or society, or perhaps a fear of a breakdown in health. In waking life he says, " I'm all right, if I just

SURVIVAL OF THE PAST

hang on." In dream, the other idea comes uppermost. "No, you're in for a crash."

On hearing this explanation my friend argued, "Yes, but only a sailor could have a dream like mine. A farm-labourer would not know anything about masts and rigging." That again was true; a farm-labourer's dream in a similar case would use different symbols; he might, for instance, dream that he was sinking in a bog and that the grass to which he clung was giving way; or he might imagine himself falling from the loft of a barn down to the cobbled floor below, or making some other fatal dive within his experience. The Bergsonian view of this case would be that falling dreams are caused by the heart suddenly missing a beat when changing time just before waking, and that very likely is part of the truth, but only part.

It is usual for those who have in their youth sat for difficult examinations to dream, long after their schooling is over, that they have to go in again for another most severe examination; they experience all the old anxiety. It would be wrong under the circumstances to regard this as a survival or repetition of the past; a dream of this kind would most probably symbolise a trial coming to the dreamer in the near future, a trial of endurance, courage, or wits, but one about which the person who dreams has perhaps

THE MEANING OF DREAMS

been taking a more hopeful view than facts permit.

To give a third more particular illustration of this point that though the past may be referred to, it does not as such recur. A holiday maker dreamed a dream in which a young woman appeared as a Greek Siren luring him on the rocks of the south coast sea-resort where they were staying together ; he was moved to tell this dream jokingly to Miss Helen whatever-name-was and to say " How ridiculous ! I know why I dreamed that. I was at school here as a very little boy ; you remember I pointed it out to you yesterday as we were starting for our row : I remember reading about Ulysses and the Sirens in the bottom form. Then, when I was rowing, you wanted to try too, and I was afraid you would have us on the rocks, because there was a current in that direction. I suppose I was going back to my childhood." They both laughed and neither saw that the siren image and the image " on the rocks " were warnings to the young man that his infatuation might land him in serious financial difficulty, that Helen is a name of ill-luck in a classical context, and that though the Siren story was first heard in his childhood it had a different meaning when it occurred again with variations in later life.

SURVIVAL OF THE PAST

An important question to be examined is the possibility of dreams having more than one meaning at a time : I believe this to be not only possible but usual. The more logic-loving interpreters of dreams will object, and look for only one meaning for every image : in so doing they will imitate the Classical critics of romantic poetry who are unable to see that a single romantic image often does duty for a number of experiences emotionally linked up together. A woman friend of mine once dreamed that she had great difficulty in turning a large car in a narrow country lane. I believe that this dream stood for several difficulties in her life of that time, from the most particular to the most general. There was, I believe actual anxiety about turning her new car, whose mechanism she did not altogether rely on, in the narrow lanes near her country home. The turning of the car was also, however, symbolising the difficulty of making a proposed change of plans by which the question of household expense could be solved. In a third still more general sense the dream might stand for the difficulty of revising any powerful impulse without danger of accident where the road of habit is a narrow one.

Where there are two or more meanings to a dream these will be found to be all linked up together, in the same conflict or solution. In

THE MEANING OF DREAMS

the first sense of this dream, for instance, the anxiety was not for personal safety, so much as for the safety of the car, which was an expensive one. In the second sense, the car was not only a symbol of the more expensive style of living but was actually one of the chief items of expense ; her trouble was that to do without a car in the country would be a difficult and even dangerous experiment for a woman in her position. In the third sense the difficulty of economising when accustomed to the old-fashioned country house style was symbolic of a difficulty wider than one of credit and debit, the difficulty of appeasing a narrow social tradition.

Similarly, the dream mentioned in the last chapter about the house collapsing might be interpreted either to mean that the house actually was insecure, or that there was danger of a collapse in health or of a financial collapse. A severe breakdown in health will often lead naturally to a financial breakdown, and in the case I quoted we saw that the financial position was already so insecure that the dreamer could neither afford to pay for repairs to the house nor for a holiday to repair his health. The three anxieties, then, are bound up together and therefore conveniently use the one symbol. As a further instance of this point ; a young

SURVIVAL OF THE PAST

Scot just before taking his University finals once dreamed of a busy railway station. Trains were continually running at full speed along each side of the station, which was triangular in shape, and yet somehow not colliding. The general feeling in the dream was one of satisfaction that he had scored over the friends who were standing by him and saying "We don't believe it's possible." The triangular railway station is the subject of a well-known mathematical problem extremely difficult to grasp. The dream certainly referred to this particular problem which had puzzled the student in waking life, as being in mathematical theory possible, in practice impossible. It also certainly referred to the advisability of adding a third subject, mathematics, to the other two, Classics and Classical Philosophy, in which he was trying for University honours. His friends had warned him that it was just possible to work *full speed along two lines* like Classics and Classical Philosophy but to work *along a third line* would be to ruin his chances in all three subjects. It is theoretically possible, they said, to get honours in three subjects but impossible in practice without the danger of a breakdown. In the wider sense then, the dream was a declaration that what is theoretically possible is also practically possible.

These chapters will, I hope, supply readers

THE MEANING OF DREAMS

with a general method of interpreting their dreams for themselves or their intimate friends without having to consult superstitious dream manuals, or doctors, or old wives ; and they will know best how to use this knowledge. I would only suggest that the usual claim of modern dream-interpreters is not justified, when they say that once a dream of conflict is interpreted the conflict thereby ends. The interpretation of a dream will not bring back a loved one from the dead, nor provide the Polar explorer with a satisfying meal of fried eggs and bacon, nor end the war for a shell-shocked soldier. If a dream of conflict is interpreted and the conflict remains strong, the dream will merely change its symbols and come again in a new disguise. The claim that a patient suffering from a nervous disease can be cured by mere interpretation of his dreams is possibly due to this, that once a recurring nightmare is interpreted its symbols cannot have the same effect again, and therefore the nightmare disappears. It was supposed that the illness of the patient was simply due to that particular nightmare and not to the conflict which the nightmare dramatises.

A woman of my acquaintance used to dream a dream, the same with only very slight variations at least once every week for some twenty years. In this dream she was in an old-

SURVIVAL OF THE PAST

fashioned drawing-room listening to a young girl dressed in early Victorian costume playing a sentimental tune on a violin. In the middle of the playing the door opened, the melody broke off and she awoke but always in disappointment not to have heard the end of that melody. One day in waking life she heard her tune, an out of the way old piece, played right through at a concert and found in the programme the name of the composer. Afterwards this particular dream never came again, but other dreams did making it quite clear to me that the girl with the violin was really herself, and that the interrupted melody was symbolic of a quiet pleasant course of life that had been interrupted by a sudden resolve to become independent and take up a career. The door opening in the old-fashioned drawing-room suggests this opening of a new life, but the disappointment at the interrupted melody suggests that the difficulties and anxieties of the profession in which she won eventually a position of great responsibility, led her dream-self to wish that she had never embarked on it. It is true that at some time in her youth the dreamer must have heard this actual melody and been disappointed when it was interrupted by an intrusion, but the old unsatisfied wish to hear the end of the tune is merely recalled as a symbol of the unsatisfied wish for a continuance

THE MEANING OF DREAMS

of the quiet old-fashioned life. The point I wish to make is that when eventually she did hear the melody completed, it could no longer be a symbol for her longing, therefore the dream never came again ; this longing, however, remained, and could only have been satisfied had she resigned her position, which she could not afford, and, on the whole, did not wish to resign. It is unlikely that this interpretation could have been made by the woman who dreamed the story, while still holding her position, because in her waking life she would certainly have denied that she was at all dissatisfied with her profession. If eventually it had happened that she was able to retire in the usual way on a pension, the conflict would then have been at an end, and it would have been possible for her to admit the truth of the interpretation.

I would strongly suggest that where a dream has been interpreted as showing a conflict, but no solution seems possible, the usual attempt to transfer the desire, say, for drink or other excesses into a new channel of games or work or religion is not practical. The battlefield of the fighting forces may be changed, but the battle and bitterness continue unabated ; and the best that can result from such a change is a temporary relief. Suppose the drunkard of the Cadville story¹ has been changed into a violent Pro-

¹ Chapter II.

SURVIVAL OF THE PAST

Prohibitionist when he has realised that drink is destroying his health and self-respect ; then the Prohibition meetings he attends will supply the society and artificial merriment as well or better than the public house, but it is most unlikely that he will treat his wife or children better ; or have more time to spend at his work, or bring more money home at the end of the week. The " shell-shocked " soldier may take to drink or golf or marriage as a means of side-tracking his " nerves " ; but none of these three cures can end a European War which, while it continues, is responsible for his condition.

Too much confidence must not be therefore put in the immediate practical benefits of the science of dream interpretation ; very often the discovery of the meaning of a man's dreams may be no more hopeful an event than a doctor's diagnosis of an incurable case of cancer. This is not to suggest that cancer will always be incurable, or that in the particular conflict we have instanced between drink and an unhappy teetotalism there is no possible solution. I would however strongly suggest that it is hopeless to expect the conflict to be ended by the teetotaller breaking his pledge or by the drunkard constantly signing it again whenever the strain of drinking gets unbearable ; some altogether new element must come into the situation

THE MEANING OF DREAMS

before the conflict can end, and this new element is not to be discovered by any short cut. There is no room for compromise, either ; cutting down drink to a certain daily allowance or setting fixed days on which cocoa shall be drunk and not beer, only makes the conflict more intense.

A solution in the case I have given would be provided most naturally by a review of the situation, and a decision that the main point of dispute is not the beer-or-cocoa question but those other questions which the dream about Mr. Cadville has brought out clearly. John Jones goes to the inn, why ? For company, warmth and gossip ; and he drinks, why ? Because one must drink and stand drinks and be stood drinks when one visits an inn, and because drink drowns the memory of his disagreements with his wife. Then if the situation at home can be bettered by a removal of all sources of annoyance on either side, such as noisiness of children, the gramophone dispute, and the disposal of the week's wages, and if a third place of entertainment can be found for John Jones (with his wife's whole-hearted approval), that is neither an inn, nor a temperance headquarters, but a social club of sorts with a new interest, why then there is no clear need for the conflict to continue. Such solutions can only be discovered by active and resourceful

SURVIVAL OF THE PAST

brains, ones ready to face the situation, and to make no attempt at compromise, with faith that if both sides in the conflict will cease from hostility a new element will appear to make the old conflict unnecessary. In this case, for instance, the test of the solution will be whether John Jones and his wife will ever again care one way or the other whether it is beer or cocoa that he drinks at his meals, or when he is thirsty, or at any other time.

The claim that the past surviving unknown to the patient causes his present disturbances, is when you come to examine it a most hopeless and unthinkable claim. Now, the professional dream interpreter puzzled by a dream and unable to make out from the patient what the symbolism means generally uses an ingenious but rather tedious system of testing the patient's reactions to suggestion. He reads out long lists of words grouped at random and asks the patient to answer immediately what each word suggests. For example, DOG, answer CAT; VIOLET, answer SPRING; ORANGE, answer SUNSET; HIT, answer BALL. Whenever the patient pauses a long while over any word, the interpreter marks it for future reference, and when he has made a good collection of these marked words, concludes that they concern somehow the chief conflict disturbing the patient, on the ground

THE MEANING OF DREAMS

that one forgets the associations of words which are painful to remember. The interpreter then tries to fit these words together to form some sort of story, and by making suggestions to the patient often actually succeeds in making him admit having had in forgotten nursery days a painful experience of the kind suggested. Suppose the words were "Penny", "Drop", "Bridge", and "Lose", the interpreter would get the dreamer to admit having as a child been for a long while extremely ashamed of having dropped a penny over a bridge, the penny not being his own but secretly taken from his mother's purse—this is an instance not nearly as far fetched as some provided by the psychoanalysts. The point that I would make here is that this method of "testing by free-association" is sound enough; stumbling over these words does point to an incident of the sort the interpreter suggests having taken place in the patient's early life. But, to suppose that this loss of a penny in the past is enough to cause nervous disorder in a grown person who now thinks in shillings or pounds or even greater sums is grotesque. What really is the matter with the patient is probably some feared loss of money or other property, which was not his own to do as he liked with, a loss symbolised by this childish memory, and capable of causing the

SURVIVAL OF THE PAST

same degree of shame in the grown man as the loss of the penny caused him as a child. This memory has become part of his dream life because the waking self has been unable to face fully the serious consequences of his carelessness. If the psychanalytic claim were right and it was nothing but the loss of that particular penny that was at the root of the disorder, the only true solution of the conflict would be the recovery of that actual and unique coin and its return to the identical purse from which it was taken—a tragi-comic situation reminding us of the invisible man in W. S. Gilbert's *Bab Ballads*, who wandered the world for ever in search of certain lost undergarments.

This is not to say that an event of childhood may not have been the first of a chain of disorders which lead in adult life to a nervous breakdown : but the first event is no longer the cause of the breakdown. It is usual to regard any series of, say, bouts of drunkenness in a man's life as all precisely similar in cause and effect, and to explain them all as due to one original folly or misfortune of youth. But though for convenience sake we may say " I hear that John Doe has gone back to his old drunken ways " yet if we examine the different periods of drunkenness we find that each has had a unique character of its own.

THE MEANING OF DREAMS

As a child, John Doe was secretly, every night for a year, given gin in his bottle of milk : his nurse did it to ensure sound sleep for them both. Supplies were then cut off by the scandalized parents and the nurse dismissed, but at the age of ten John Doe as a proof of his superior manliness used to pour together the wine left in the glasses at the dinner table and gulp down the mixture with apparent delight, to the admiration of an elder brother who had not had the same early training. Authority again intervened with threats and warnings and it was not until the age of twenty that John Doe broke the promise of abstinence he had given to his parents : this occasion was a love-affair which the parents had interrupted "for their son's good" and the drinking was a protest as well as a relief. John Doe drank fairly hard in secret for a year until it was again discovered and then the parents found another girl who was to perform the saintly task of reforming him. This for awhile she succeeded in doing, but relations grew strained after some years of a childless marriage the religious element irked him and at the age of thirty he began to drink again as a protest against her puritanism and the general tedium of their life together. Directly as a result of this reappearance of the old habit which took a violent form, there was a general break-up of

SURVIVAL OF THE PAST

the home. The wife temporarily lost her religious spirit and committed suicide, the mother already an invalid was killed by the shock of the news ; and the drunkard was converted to total abstinence. Until the age of forty he never touched another drop of drink but then the temperance reformer who had converted him suddenly being revealed as a secret drinker himself, John Doe returned to the bottle. He soon drank himself into *delirium tremens* and was then removed by an old friend to a house in the country where drink was unobtainable. Here he remained for another ten years, an unwilling abstainer but never with the courage to break away. The thought of drink was now a religion with him and when his friend eventually died and John Doe had his freedom he sacrificed himself very speedily on the altar of his god and died in his sixty-second year.

According to the theory that the survival of the infantile past is alone responsible for the disorder, it would in this case have been possible to cure the drunkard even in his last stages by giving him nightly the teaspoonful of gin in six ounces of milk by the discontinuing of which the conflict started. Which seems an over-simple remedy to gain much confidence. Besides, we find in looking at John Doe's life that it is not one prolonged conflict from cradle to grave but

THE MEANING OF DREAMS

has distinct periods of harmony, and in each case it is a new variety of conflict that starts him drinking again. If we examine John Doe's dreams at any of the later crises of his life we are likely to find plentiful references to the boyhood incident of the wine-glasses or even to the earlier gin-and-milk episode. Even if he had forgotten these events completely the testing by word-lists would soon awaken their memories; but the needs that drink satisfied in those earlier days would in later life become only a matter of history, no longer active for pleasure or pain. There is of course a reason for these early memories to return in dreams and that is, when the mind interprets and classifies the present in terms of the past and is thinking in symbolism, any present feeling of helplessness in face of authority or any heightening of emotional stress where drink is concerned, would naturally find a most convenient image in these memories of childhood.

An interesting and rather unfortunate result of this prolonged raking-up of nursery memories, for the psychanalytic course is usually carried over a period of months or years, is that as time goes on a sort of mock-childishness settles on the patient. So much importance being laid on his forgotten early years he finds it pays him to live the past over again in memory, with a

SURVIVAL OF THE PAST

return of the child's uncontrolled emotion and quick change of mood and loose talkativeness on subjects usually only discussed with intimates. Too often the interpreter is chosen as his new parent in this mock-childhood, with strange results.

CHAPTER VI

THE VALUE OF DREAMS ON THEIR
OWN ACCOUNT



CHAPTER VI

VALUE OF DREAMS ON THEIR OWN ACCOUNT

THE views I have been holding here lay me open, perhaps, to the criticism that I have only touched on one side of the question of dreams. Dreams, it may be held, have a value on their own account, quite apart from the light that they throw on the waking life, and my title *The Meaning of Dreams* only refers to a waking view of these dreams, as if waking life were all that counts. It may further be held that to explain any fact or process or experience in terms of another fact or experience, is never to account for it or give it the value it deserves on its own merits. This criticism will come most strongly from the opium-smoker, the spiritualist, the romantic poet, from bereaved husbands, wives or parents, and others who find a relief from the wretchedness of waking-life in some form of dream, trance, vision or inspiration. Such people even claim for dreams a higher form of experience than that of practical every-day life. In face of this claim it would be safest to assume

THE MEANING OF DREAMS

that dream life *has* a value of its own, different from that of waking life, but not to be compared with it for better or worse. To support this assumption that dream life has a value of its own many objections have to be met, none of them however very serious ones.

A common objection will be that dream life is inferior to waking life because in it there is no communication with our fellow beings. The same objection might be raised to those powerful and intense moments of our life when we sit alone with our thoughts puzzling out a difficult problem or enjoying some newly discovered harmony, moments in which any intrusion from our fellow beings would be very unwelcome. The solemn joy that comes from a sky full of stars, the pleasant companionship of the countryside on a warm spring day, or a period of solitary religious meditation, are these experiences to be discounted as inferior just because there is no communication in them with our fellow-beings? In dreams as a matter of fact we not only form judgments of a most important kind about our friends and foes and see a new and unexpected light thrown on their actions, but as I have suggested we sometimes actually communicate with them in some other way than by eye and ear.

Again, it is often objected that dreams are

VALUE OF DREAMS

valueless because unreal. What then is the test of reality to be? Is thought unreal? Are faith and knowledge unreal? But thought, faith and knowledge of a new and constructive kind not merely a muddled re-grouping of yesterday's waking experience do occur in dream life. Unless therefore, the only real thing in this human world is the activity of waking life, mere unconscious activity apart from any judgment we pass upon it, dreams can never be charged with unreality.

Those who raise these and similar objections to the reality of dreams may finally be reduced to repeating that dreams are unreal and therefore valueless because the events which occur in them are beyond reach of proof in the waking life. They will ask, "where is the cake which you dreamed that you were eating last night?" This view if examined will be found to rule out of life as valueless all religious experience, all imaginative art and literature. Though for instance *Hamlet* or the parable of the Unjust Steward cannot be tested for historical truth as we test a news paragraph in the local newspaper, are these therefore valueless? The question of proof or history does not arise in such cases. As for the cake, quite apart from questions of its possible symbolism, a dream cake seems at least as real to me as the credit system of

THE MEANING OF DREAMS

banking, or the theories of democracy and parliamentary representation, or the buying and selling on the Stock Exchange of often quite hysterical hopes and fears and promises.

In whatever way these complaints about the unreality of dreams may be stated they are probably due to the following causes. Dreams, if direct, generally express a view that is hostile to waking life and cannot therefore be accepted as real by the waking self ; or if symbolic, cannot be understood and are therefore equally unacceptable. If they are nightmares they must be called unreal in self protection ; if they are pleasurable dreams the waking self, being unable to recapture their pleasure, calls them unreal in the fox-and-sour-grapes spirit.

The chief trouble about the whole subject of dream interpretation from the point of view, that is, of the scientist and of the man concerned with proofs, is that not only is it difficult to know by what method to start classifying dreams, owing to their enormous variety and the obscurity of the conflicts from which they spring ; but the records of classifications hitherto made can in no way be checked as one may check any other scientific theory, by carefully reproducing the conditions under which these dreams occurred. I cannot suppose myself a less truthful person than the average writer on the subject of dreams,

VALUE OF DREAMS

and will even claim that I am more truthful in that I admit frankly that in certain cases for the sake of the argument I have run together two and even three records of dreams that have come to my notice, where the conflict was in outline similar. My reasons for doing so have been to make the argument clearer, the book less of a catalogue and the dreams themselves more interesting to the reader, and also to spare the feelings of those who have sometimes without knowing it confided their private affairs to me by telling me their dreams. In taking this course, I have availed myself of the licence readily allowed to poets and novelists, that of telling the truth by a condensation and dramatisation of their experiences of life—which is, of course, the method of dreams themselves and a very good one. There is no reason that I can see for scientists to object to this way of writing so long as the general principles of classification satisfy them. Their method of recording each case minutely and conscientiously may be sure, but is at any rate extremely slow. Scientists will always, as it were, pause before the slightest pool or stream that lies in their way and set to work building a heavy bridge across it, where the poet or the imaginative person runs round or leaps across, getting his

THE MEANING OF DREAMS

feet a bit muddy perhaps, but at any rate getting past the obstacle quickly.

A friend of mine once propounded the following problem in mathematics to a group of eminent scientists gathered for a conference :—
“ two cyclists riding towards each other on a straight and level road at different speeds are troubled by the activities of a dragonfly which begins darting backwards and forwards from one to the other of them at a speed of fifteen miles an hour. The speed of the dragonfly is twice the pace of the slower of the cyclists, whom it attacks first. The cyclists meet and kill the dragonfly. The swifter cyclist takes an hour to reach the point in the road where he meets the slower. How many miles did the dragon-fly cover ? ” It was greatly to the credit of the mathematicians that after working out immense sums on large sheets of paper (let x miles per hour equal the speed of the slower cyclist and y that of the swifter cyclist ; then since $2x$ is the speed of the dragonfly etc.) most of them got the right answer, right to four places of decimals. But I have no doubt that my unscientific readers have had no need to bridge that stream with algebraic formulae, either simple or advanced, but have leaped it quite easily. In fact I shall not insult them by giving the answer.

VALUE OF DREAMS

In this problem of mathematics, the chief point is, of course, to avoid irrelevances, of which the speeds of the cyclists and the course taken in flight by the dragon fly are the chief ; so similarly in the problem of the proper classification of dreams the writer must concentrate on the particular features that in each case appear significant, omitting the rest from discussion. As with omissions, so with additions ; if occasionally in order to illustrate a point I have had, for instance in the case of the Cadville story, to embroider a bare outline of history with picturesque detail, such additions do not make the story any the less true as illustrating the general mechanism of the fantastic dream which arises out of conflict ; and indeed the easiness with which the images have formed in my mind with a complicated cross-reference already existing between them (before any attempt was made to examine them logically, detail by detail) is in itself a proof of the constructive and direct powers of this fantastic method of thought, a proof of the value of dreams on their own account.



CHAPTER VII
PRACTICAL BENEFITS OF
INTERPRETATION



CHAPTER VII

PRACTICAL BENEFITS OF INTERPRETATION

SAMUEL BUTLER in his satiric novel *Erewhon* (the word "nowhere" reversed) published in 1872 was perhaps the first popular writer to discuss the close connection between crime and disease. The citizens of his mythical country Erewhon considered it a crime to be ill physically, but to be ill morally they regarded in the same light as we regard physical ill-health. So a woman suffering from chronic indigestion finds it important to give out that she is a martyr to intemperance, and a man with a bad cold wins sympathy instead of abuse from his friends by saying that he has unfortunately been detected in the act of stealing some pocket handkerchiefs from a stall in the market. In more serious cases of ill-health such as that of a prisoner in the last stages of consumption being tried for this offence against society, all sorts of excuses are made on his behalf by the defending counsel who points to his client's persistent depravity, but the Judge brushing these appeals to pity aside inflicts a terrible sentence. Instead

THE MEANING OF DREAMS

of doctors the Erewhonians had moral "straighteners" to whom they confessed their errors, and by whom they were drastically treated until they recovered their moral well-being.

This satire was, of course, aimed at the modern European legal system under which, until comparatively recent times, sickness of mind or body was considered no excuse for crime. The point of view emphasised by Butler has, however, gained such support of late years and judge and jury have been so ready to listen to medical evidence that nowadays women convicted of shop-lifting frequently escape imprisonment or reprimand by producing medical evidence that they were at the time of the offence suffering from "the megrims." A new verdict is also admitted in capital charges, that of "guilty but insane," under which the moral stigma is avoided at the cost of admitting mental ill-health. In the case of betrayed mothers who, while still suffering from the nervous shock of confinement, have murdered their babies, there is no longer any need for the unhappy practice of passing a death-sentence with a recommendation for mercy, which may or may not be granted. Here, of course, we get on very dangerous ground from the moral point of view and unless the present ethical tradition greatly changes this thin edge of the

BENEFITS OF INTERPRETATION

wedge will lead to a great many compromises as unsatisfactory as the old downright law of a life for a life. These reflections on insanity are here suggested by the view I have been offering that insanity is the occurrence in waking life of methods of action and thought more familiar in dreams of the night. The importance of a well-founded science of dream-interpretation becomes clearer when the dreamer is tried on a capital charge not before a dream-jury but before a jury of waking-life.

However the laws may change on these lines, Butler's satiric prophecy has been curiously fulfilled where it concerns the profession of the straightener; he has lately arrived under the title of psycho-analyst. This Greek-English word means "one who analyses the soul of" his patient, as opposed to the physician who analyses his physical ailments. Where the psychanalyst (this is the more correct form) goes further and after analysing the symbolism of his patient's by-products of soul, his dreams, undertakes to cure the sick soul, he calls himself a psychotherapist or a psychiatrist; and if this is not a straightener, it is near enough to make no odds.

The relationship of the dreamer with the psychanalyst is a very ticklish one, the more so when the latter as a psychotherapist claims that

THE MEANING OF DREAMS

he can by some means or other get rid of the conflicts which he discovers in the course of his examination. The dreamer either must believe or disbelieve in the psychotherapist; if he disbelieves he will be continually misleading him in the vital points of history which might offer a clue to the meaning of the dreams; if he believes he will generally take a hero-worshipping attitude towards his healer of souls and lose both self-respect and initiative by so doing. In this second case the psychotherapist will often believe the conflict at an end when it is simply suspended for a while by the patient's obedience and blind trust in his hero to whom, in cases where the conflict is caused by a love affair, the patient will often transfer his or her affections. After the war, if we are to believe the evidence of the contemporary novel and the stunt press, a number of young women set up as psychotherapists and used this transference for curing " shell-shocked " soldiers, but this transference proved a dangerous practice because obviously each psychotherapist could only hope to use it as a permanent cure in a single case, and then should have stopped practising for fear of making the conflicts all round worse than ever. Generally speaking, as soon as this blind trust or affection for the psychotherapist suffers a set-back the conflict will return, and by return-

BENEFITS OF INTERPRETATION

ing shake the patient's faith in the science of interpretation, and a new doctor will have to begin all over again. Again, where there is a sympathy formed between the interpreter and the dreamer, either the dreamer may actually dream to suit the interpreter's theories, without being aware of this intention, or may in recalling his dreams add to them in a way calculated to please the interpreter, again unaware of the deception; or, if asked leading questions as to what the associations are in his own mind of the chief features of the dream, may give answers to suit the theory that the interpreter has already formed to cover the general mechanism of dreams and the nature of the particular conflict in which this patient is involved. If on the other hand there is antagonism between the interpreter and the dreamer, exactly the reverse may happen in the dreaming, the recalling of the dream and the assisted interpretation. Even Freud has so far modified his views as to suggest that some of his patient's passionate dreams are particularly bound up with the intention of upsetting the Freudian theory.

The confession-box which the psychanalytic consulting room has become has its good points; once a hideous secret is told to an ear accustomed to similar confessions, it is apt to become less hideous. No horror rises in the listener's

THE MEANING OF DREAMS

eyes ; he will hear the most horrible confessions with a bland smile that means " Typical ! Typical ! A very pretty case," and the patient has the great satisfaction of learning that he is not alone among the unfortunates who have anti-social tendencies. The most usual method is to trace the meaning of a patient's grown-up dreams to events in childhood ; then to say " you have been, for years, living in your childhood, isn't that curious, not to say silly ? Now you understand how it has all come about you will be quite well again." This if said earnestly and cheerfully enough will afford immense relief, but the relief will wear off when it is found that the present grown-up conflict is still going strong.

The psychotherapist is able to do very little for a patient beyond interpreting his or her dreams in a plausible if extravagant manner and usually starting a new phase of conflict in which the advantage will be with the interest hitherto beaten. He is in most cases unable to interview all the people concerned in the conflict that is causing the trouble : and therefore is liable to get a mistaken view of the situation and to sacrifice the interests of the party he does not see for those of his client.

I was talking to a doctor who has many cases on his hands of patients suffering from bad

BENEFITS OF INTERPRETATION

dreams, and he related in outline a typical case of triangular tangle. A Mrs. X was suffering from nightmares and an undefined restlessness, and the doctor's examination of these dreams unfolded the following story. She had married at eighteen the first man that came along, and with the principal intention of having children. There was no romance on her part and the motives of the husband were principally sensual. When at the age of twenty-five she had five children and thought it enough, there came along a man who for the first time taught her what it was to be in love. The newcomer was a clergyman of socialistic ideals and they behaved very indiscreetly in their purely platonic relationship. The husband suspected the worst, wrote to the bishop to have the clergyman disciplined and extracted a promise from his wife never again to see or write to her lover. Being a good wife in the orthodox sense she obeyed. The children grew up and married and went abroad. She was still in her forties when she found that her occupation as a mother was gone ; but that her duties as a wife were not enough to occupy her. She founded a hospital for consumptive children and became matron-housekeeper. It was said that she overworked, but that was not true : she was strong enough and had plenty of money and assistance.

THE MEANING OF DREAMS

At all events the nightmares began shortly after the children began to arrive and she found general tonics did no good. She went to the doctor. "I found," said the doctor, "that good works being associated in her mind with her former lover, every time she admitted another case to her hospital-beds she dreamed that she was about to become a mother by him and defied her husband to divorce her. If you like to put it in terms of your conflict theory, the hitherto defeated interest asserted itself with tremendous force, and when she awoke she was much ashamed of her wickedness in having such dreams. I told her what was happening and she accepted it without much comment, as a true account, with the result that she had no more bad nights, and worked four times as hard as before at her hospital-work without any feeling of fatigue."

"May I finish the story, doctor?" I asked, "from logical reasoning?" "Certainly!" "She came a few days later and thanked you heartily for a complete cure and you did not demur. But you know well enough that you merely assisted Mrs. X in the re-establishment of a forgotten romance, and gave her the excuse of her own health and the welfare therefore of the children's hospital, for breaking the spirit though not the letter of her promise. And I

BENEFITS OF INTERPRETATION

will venture a heavy bet that between Mrs. X and her husband there is a growing disagreement and it must end in a complete separation before long." "It has already come to that," said the Doctor. "Well, doctor, this hardly suggests a permanent solution of conflict: and I'd not be surprised to hear of a new stage of conflict in which regret for this new attitude to her husband starts fresh nightmares in your nameless patient. But may I give you an instance of a case where the solution really satisfied me?"

"Unlike your Mrs. X, Mrs. Z began by doing 'the wrong thing.' She was secretly engaged to a young soldier during the war and the marriage had been arranged to take place as soon as possible. Then the soldier was ordered overseas at twenty-four hours notice, but the marriage licence was not valid until a week later. In the bitterness of the moment both lost their heads and a baby was born in due course, shortly after the father had been killed in action. The woman was living away from home as a hospital nurse, and in order to spare the feelings of her parents who were very stern puritans she did not tell her secret. She arranged for the child to be sent to a foundlings' home. A year later she married and had a happy life with her husband, to whom she had told her history, and the boy who was born to

THE MEANING OF DREAMS

them. Two years later the second catastrophe came. Her husband also was killed in action, and the boy died. It nearly broke her completely. Having little money of her own and few friends she went home to live with her parents ; they had lost none of their rigid moral sense and were also rather decrepit, so her life with them was not at all easy. Particularly she was troubled by very bad dreams in which it seemed to her that she had locked up a kitten in a chest and that the kitten was mewling to come out, but two big stone tablets were now lying on the chest and she did not dare lift up the lid for fear they might slip off on the floor and wake her parents. She went to a doctor.

“Fortunately the doctor happened to be as sympathetic and cunning as yourself. He reconstructed her history in bare outline and she confessed to the details. The kitten shut up in the chest was the little girl at the foundling hospital. The two stone tablets were the *Ten Commandments* and all that they implied : she was afraid of admitting to the illegitimate child for fear of outraging her parents’ moral sense. It was not cowardice on her part, as she had once bravely told her husband about it before their marriage ; it was anxiety not to hurt them unnecessarily when they were in bad health. Her waking self

BENEFITS OF INTERPRETATION

decided that the child must stay where it was until the grandparents were dead ; her dream self decided that this was most unfair on the child who was growing up in surroundings that might blight its future life.

“ The doctor explained this conflict to her and asked her what she proposed to do. Was there any possibility of adopting the child without saying whose child it was ? She answered that there was no difficulty as far as money went and she had half thought of this course herself, only how could she explain it to her parents who would oppose the adoption of the child on the grounds that she was not well enough to undertake it ? The doctor said that he would interview the parents if necessary and tell them that all their daughter needed to cure her of her illness which was only mental, was the patter of little feet on the nursery floor. ‘ If that phrase about “ the patter of little feet ” does not do the trick,’ said the doctor, ‘ I’ll eat my hat.’

“ The patient was delighted at this as a good solution, but her face fell when she thought of the woman who had been first her own nurse and then her little boy’s nurse, and was now loyally staying with her as a lady’s maid. ‘ Nurse will be sure to recognise the child as mine, she is so like my little boy and like what I was

THE MEANING OF DREAMS

myself as a girl: and nurse is as narrowly religious as my parents, and can't keep a secret.' 'Then,' said the doctor, 'you must go to your nurse and say, "Nurse, I have been worrying about you. I don't think staying here like this is fair on you. I believe you would be happier where there is a baby. Although we would miss you terribly, it is only fair to offer you your freedom."' If that phrase about going where there is a baby does not do the trick,' added the doctor, 'I will once more eat my hat.' The end of the story is that the nurse was delighted, the parents were delighted, the child was delighted, and the mother was delighted, and all are now busy living happily ever after."

The doctor to whom I told this story replied "That's all very well. Recently I came across a middle-aged woman, a Miss Y, for whom, some twenty-two years ago, an old playfellow recovering in England from wounds just received in South Africa, began to show a greater passion than she thought it proper to return. Startled into the anger of self-defence by his attentions, she rounded on him and said that love was henceforth a forbidden subject, and if friendship could not be restored on its old footing she never wanted to see him again. While this anger persisted she had constant dreams of accepting his caresses, and the thought of these dreams

BENEFITS OF INTERPRETATION

made her still more bitter against him ; she did not say goodbye to him when he returned to fight, and she wrote no letters. He quite naturally began venting his anger on the Boers, and taking reckless risks was shot. Then she reproached herself indeed and wished that she had written and accepted his love (as her dreams had prompted her to do). She called herself heartless, wicked, cruel, unpatriotic, and being religious blamed it on diabolical possession. Since when her dreams have changed their former character completely ; she has persistent nightmares of losing her temper and withholding bread from the starving, robbing a child of its flower and kicking a cat from the milk saucer. Her daily life has become one long round of charity which assumes ridiculous forms such as taking off her clothes in the street to give to beggarmen.

“What can a doctor do for a woman of this kind ? It is male companionship she is hankering after and children of her own, and unless I can do something practical to supply these needs I cannot claim a cure. It was hard on me because I couldn't even bring myself to explain to her what her dreams were all about. I just gave her a general tonic.”

The psychanalyst is often a medical man or woman but quite as often as not an unqualified

THE MEANING OF DREAMS

person who cares little for the physical side of his patient's disorder but concentrates on a thorough overhauling of his moral record. The technique is of course very different from those of the Christian Scientists, Couéists and other faith-healers but they are all alike in their emphasis of the importance of mind over matter, soul over body. They are also united as enemies of that part of the medical profession, which not finding any mention of the soul in anatomical text-books disapproves strongly of any scientific study which assumes its existence ; and which further grudges the loss of those large numbers of idle and wealthy patients who once made a practice worth having but who now, growing tired of tonics and novel operations and various electric, saline and other treatments, are being converted to faith-healing in one form or other, and enjoying either the exquisite pleasure of frequent " testimony " or the unique and staggering " complexes " provided them by the psychanalysts.

I must say that between the healer who believes that the root of all evil is a purely physical disorder, indigestion or the faulty action of the ductless glands, and the healer who fails to recognise the importance of the body as such at all, I find little to choose, or no more than between the rival schools of

BENEFITS OF INTERPRETATION

thought, one of which held that the owl came before the egg, and the other that the egg came before the owl. Whether the sickness of the body, the owl, comes before or follows the sickness of the soul, the egg, is not an important question. The point is that owls are owls and "eggs is eggs" and neither is independent of the other: each physical illness then, the disordered action of matter, must be believed to correspond with a sickness of the soul, or "mind" (so long as "mind" is not used to denote merely the activities of the human brain, but in a wider sense). We may turn gratefully to the old quip "What is mind? No matter! What is Matter? Never mind!", but must remember that they are, at any rate, distinguishable and deserving of equal respect.

Dreams of conflict, then, which are concurrent with physical disorders as also with conflict in the waking life, may be regarded as symptomatic of a sickness in the mind, and a doctor will not be a good doctor unless he attends to the sickness both of mind and body. This may seem a commonplace, yet the trouble is that between the medical tradition of treating the body as the seat of all sickness and the religious tradition of Sin, that is, soul-sickness being responsible for physical infirmities, there is a great gulf, as the rather ludicrous compromises of the recent

THE MEANING OF DREAMS

Church Report on Faith Healing make plain. This report amounted to a recommendation for sick persons to call in simultaneously a doctor and a priest. Imagination conjures up some pretty bedside comedies if this course should be widely adopted ; the priest believing in the all-sufficiency of faith and the laying on of hands, the general practitioner whose economic interests are bound up with lancet and aseptic lint dressings, and ferro-phosphates and such-like. The ideal treatment for nervous cases would seem to be by one who is aware of the powers and limits of the pharmacopeia, but who is also aware of the powers and limits of moral straightening ; who can interpret his patient's dreams in outline and get him to fill in the details himself ; who can resist a short-cut to cure by any of these popular methods ; " magnetic " domination of the patient ; changing the battle ground of the conflict ; making out that the conflict is over once it is traced to an event in the past ; helping the hitherto defeated interest to become victorious, so only starting a new phase of conflict ; general tonics ; recommendations to foreign travel ; telling the patient that there is nothing wrong with him but nerves, and the sooner he pulls himself together the better. He must be one who will not pooh-pooh the dream-life as

BENEFITS OF INTERPRETATION

unimportant or at its best only a means to the understanding of the waking life, and who above all will keep his respect for all parties concerned in the conflict to which the dreams refer, attempting wherever possible to treat the whole group as a single patient. As a preliminary test of a good dream interpreter one might conveniently take his sense of humour and his understanding appreciation of romantic poetry : both of these qualities if he has them well developed point to a power of imaginative thought, a power of relating distant thought-associations, without which the widest medical knowledge of the functions of the nerves and the brain are sadly inadequate ; but let him have this knowledge too. As a preliminary test of a good psychotherapist one might conveniently take his interest in and attitude towards party politics ; a staunch Conservative, a convinced and life-long Liberal or an enthusiastic and bitter Labour-man would be all well avoided, but so also would the steadfast non-party man. The first three cases would each be symptomatic of undue emphasis laid on one particular group of interests which though on the surface merely political are likely, even certain, to be far deeper rooted and to imply a set formula for dealing with all questions of conflict. I could perhaps make this point clearer by relating how a famous

THE MEANING OF DREAMS

professor recently lectured on the Elizabethan Drama at Ruskin Hall. On calling for questions at the end of his address, he was asked only one question, "was Shakespeare a capitalist?" Evidently the Marxian economic class-war was to be applied to all departments of thought including even aesthetics. The strictly non-party man, on the other hand, who either does not exercise his vote at all or votes for the candidate with the better moral and mental qualifications, this without a thought for his views on fiscal policy or foreign relations, is a man who will not face realities and who as a psychotherapist will not be likely to admit the force or relevance of many of the conflicts to which his patients' dreams are witness. The mind that will treat every election-contest as a unique incident, taking into consideration the public and personal capacities of the candidates, but not forgetting that there is a political label attached to each, that surely is the type of mind best suited to the psychotherapist.

CHAPTER VIII
DREAMS AND POETRY

CHAPTER VIII

DREAMS AND POETRY

IN his "Conflict and Dream" Dr. Rivers discusses the connexion of poetry and dreams, believing that they are closely allied and that the state known as "inspiration" much resembles the dream state. He holds that when poets begin to inquire into the meaning of poetry on the lines he suggests, we shall begin to know a great deal more about the nature of poetry than we do at present. He says that he has not examined the question particularly himself because "unfortunately not being a poet" he has no direct evidence to support a theory. Moreover, he says truly, few poems are written straight down as they occur to the poet but are corrected and polished and expanded by, so to speak, the waking self; in this process they lose a great deal of their dream-symbolism, and interpretation becomes extremely difficult. I might add to this that Romantic, that is Illogical or Fantastic, Poetry corresponding with dreams of deep sleep is only a small part of poetry.

THE MEANING OF DREAMS

Before the publication of Dr. Rivers' book I had already published a few notes on this subject in my *On English Poetry*, and made some suggestions about Keats' well-known *La Belle Dame sans Merci* which I think worth reprinting in an altered form, and which were the jumping-off ground of this present volume.

Here is Keats' poem as it first appeared, corrections and all, in a letter to his brother in America, followed by a few joking comments:

La belle dame sans merci—

O What can ail thee Knight at arms
Alone and palely loitering ?
The sedge is withered from the Lake
And no birds sing !

O What can ail thee Knight at arms
So haggard, and so woe begone ?
The squirrel's granary is full
And the harvest's done.

I see *death's* a lily on thy brow
With anguish moist and fever dew,
And on thy cheeks a fading rose
Fast Withereth too—

DREAMS AND POETRY

I met a Lady in the *Wilds* Meads
Full beautiful, a faery's child,
Her hair was long, her foot was light
And her eyes were wild—

I made a Garland for her head
And bracelets too, and fragrant Zone,
She look'd at me as she did love
And made sweet moan—

I set her on my pacing steed
And nothing else saw all day long,
For sidelong would she bend and sing
A faery's song—

She found me roots of relish sweet
And honey wild and *honey* manna dew,
And sure in language strange she said
I love thee true—

She took me to her elfin grot
And there she wept (and sighed full sore,
(and there she sighed
And there I shut her wild, wild eyes
With kisses four—

And there she lulled me asleep
And there I dream'd Ah Woe betide !
The latest dream I ever dreamt
On the cold hill side.

THE MEANING OF DREAMS

I saw pale Kings, and Princes too,
Pale warriors, death pale were they all,
Who cried La belle dame sans merci
Thee hath in thrall.

I saw their starv'd lips in the gloam
All tremble
With horrid warning (gaped wide,
(wide agape
And I awoke, and found me here
On the cold hill's side.

And this is why I *wither* sojourn here
Alone and palely loitering ;
Though the sedge is withered from the Lake
And no birds sing.

Why four kisses—you will say—why four, because I wish to restrain the headlong impetuosity of my Muse—she would have fain said “score” without hurting the rhyme—but we must temper the Imagination as the Critics say with Judgment. I was obliged to choose an even number that both eyes might have fair play, and to speak truly I think two a piece quite sufficient. Suppose I had said seven there would have been three-and-a-half a piece—a very awkward affair and well got out of on my side.

DREAMS AND POETRY

Here are my, somewhat revised, comments on the poem :—The psalmist introduces an outburst of sorrowful poetry in this verse, “ I kept silent, yea even from good words. My heart was hot within me and while I was thus musing, the fire kindled and at the last I spake with my tongue.” So it was I believe with Keats in the composition of this compellingly beautiful ballad. Sir Sidney Colvin’s *Life of Keats* gives the setting well enough and even helps us a good deal towards an understanding of the symbolism. We can never know exactly what it was kindled the fire, but I am inclined to agree with Sir Sidney that Keats had been reading a translation, ascribed to the poet Chaucer, from Alan Chartier’s French poem of the same title, *La Belle Dame sans Merci*. The poem runs :—

I came into a lustie green vally
Full of floures. . . . Riding an easy paas
I fell in thought of joy full desperate
With great disease and paine, so that I was
Of all lovers the most unfortunate,

and we learn further that death has separated this lover from his mistress.

We know that the heart of John Keats had been “ hot within him ” for a long while and the conflicts that made him keep silence and muse

THE MEANING OF DREAMS

in "the loitering indolence" which had lately overtaken his writing were as painful as they were complicated. "Greate disease and paine" were attacking him, body, mind and heart all at once. He had a growing passion for the "beautiful and elegant, graceful, silly, fashionable and strange. . . . MINX" Fanny Brawne (the description is his own, from a first meeting); she it was who had doubtless been "looking on him as she did love" and "Sighing full sore." This passion he fought against in self-defence; he had a feeling that she was making eyes at him out of cruelty, but as the affair advanced this suspicion could only appear in the dream-state. In the dream state too came the apprehension not yet a certainty of his own destined death from consumption, a then incurable disease that had just taken off his brother Tom. The *Merciless Lady* then represents both the love that he feared and the death that he feared.

The version I have given is the one Keats wrote in a journal letter to his brother George in America. It begins abruptly under the heading "Wednesday Evening" and shows every sign of having been recently written. Of "shutting her wild, wild eyes, with kisses four," which makes the almost intolerably painful climax to the poem, Keats jokes in

DREAMS AND POETRY

this letter with a triviality and lightheartedness that can only be regarded as genuine if Keats did not in his "waking-mood" recognize the double meaning of the phrase. This journal letter was moreover the last place in which John could afford to parade his troubles. George was in rather low water and needed cheering up and John was kindly concealing from him the serious conditions both of his own body and mind. The memory of their brother Tom's recent death from consumption made matters worse for both, George having sailed to America without realizing how ill Tom really was, so that the news had come to him as a great shock. John had been away in Scotland on a most exhausting walking tour and had come back to find Tom dying ; he had seen the lily on Tom's brow, the hectic rose on his cheek, his starved lips in horrid warning gaping, and as the final horrible duty had shut his brother's wild wild eyes with coins, not kisses. Now Fanny's mocking smile and sidelong glance play hide-and-seek through Keats' dreams with Tom's dying features, Fanny's lovely mask of cruelty with the wild wild eyes of an elf, Tom's death mask with wild wild eyes of horror and pain.

It was about this time that Keats met the poet Coleridge walking by Highgate Ponds and it is recorded that Keats "wishing to carry

THE MEANING OF DREAMS

away the memory" of meeting Coleridge asked leave to press his hand. When Keats had gone, Coleridge turned to his friend Green and said, "There is death in that hand." He described it afterwards as "a heat and a dampness"—but "fever-dew" is Keats' own word.

That *La Belle Dame* is a symbol of death by consumption does not need much proving; the suggestion is Sir Sidney Colvin's in the first place and, as I have shown, the poem is lavishly sown with phrases suggesting consumptive symptoms. To say that *La Belle Dame* is at the same time symbolic of the Fanny Brawne affair is likely to offend the logically minded; yet the double allegory is extremely common in Romantic Poetry, occurring where two conflicts are in progress at the same time in the poet's mind and are closely bound up with and aggravating each other. In this particular case Keats' love for Fanny was not a consolation for his bodily weakness; on the contrary, his fear of consumption was bound up with the fear that he would never be able to marry her, even if she did prove to love him, which she showed few signs of doing now.

It is interesting to compare Keats' two descriptions of Fanny as he first saw her with the lady of the poem, noting the "tolerable"

DREAMS AND POETRY

foot, the agreeable hair, the elfin grace and elvish manners in transformation; one may wonder, did the Knight-at-arms set her on his steed to ride an "easy paas through the green vallay", in order to see her commended profile to the best advantage? Did the natural paleness and thinness of Fanny's face as Keats describes it, form an easy link with the vision of consumption?

This is not all yet. It would be doing History an injustice to conceal here what is usually hushed up about Keats' health at this time. Though Rossetti's *Life* mentions it plainly enough, few students of Keats are aware that consumption was complicated and aggravated by another malady of the most painful and mind-torturing kind, venereal disease, which he had caught at Oxford in 1817, two years previously, while staying with Bailey the Divinity Student, and which far more than Consumption prejudiced his relations with Fanny.

Keats' one consolation for his troubles was his poetic ambition and there are many reminiscences and influences in this poem which are worth noticing. Spencer's *Faery Queen*, the ballad of Thomas the Rhymer, Malory's *Lady of the Lake*, Coleridge's *Kubla Khan*, with its singing maiden and poetic honey-dew, traceable in Keats' "honey wild and manna dew",

THE MEANING OF DREAMS

an echo from William Browne "Let no bird sing", and from Wordsworth "her eyes are wild"—these references to the poets most admired by Keats show clearly the part played by poetic ambition in the piece.

And yet even Poetry is cruel to Keats: he is now assailed by a period of poetic dumbness, so that *La Belle Dame* may represent also the figure of Poetry. Again, the close connection of this conflict of poetic ambition on the one hand and inability to write on the other, with the Fanny Brawne conflict and the Death by Disease conflict can be clearly shown; Keats' illness threatened him with only a short and painful life in which to get his work done, and his love affairs left him in a state of such uncertainty and unhappiness that he could not make any progress in the long poems from which he hoped most reputation. Again, Fanny Brawne was just the person, Keats knew, who would be impressed if he made a great name as a poet, and so poetry if he could write it, was not only a consolation to him but actually a weapon to clear the way to Fanny's love. But he could not write.

I know no poem in any language which is an apparently simple and even conventional dress yet opens up longer vistas of torment and horror and self-reproach and despair. Anyone can see

DREAMS AND POETRY

that the restlessness of the poet's mind in a setting of this sort makes it impossible for him to marshal his feelings carefully and fully and logically ; his agony if it ever finds any expression beyond a beating of the breast and a tearing of the hair will use phrases of the most condensed and perverse imagery, such phrases as King Lear, Hamlet and Shakespeare's other tragic heroes pour out in their madness of heart. If *La Belle Dame* had not been bound by Keats' regard for the poetic conventions of the men he admired, his ambition to be "among the English Poets" being part of the conflict, the whole thing might have appeared as a confused and disintegrated nightmare. I have mentioned the singing maiden of Coleridge's poem *Kubla Khan* but must make it clear that though Keats probably had the image in mind when writing of his honey wild and manna dew, that image first arose out of a very different conflict from the one that produced *La Belle Dame sans Merci*.

Kubla Khan is very generally instanced as an inspired poem which had not and never could have any particular meaning attached to it, but which can be appreciated by anyone on the strength of its simple beauty of images and rhythm. That the poem cannot be interpreted I question on principle, that it must be appre-

THE MEANING OF DREAMS

ciated by everyone is disproved by this, that a great many readers have no use whatever for it. It is a particularly useful poem for purposes of our enquiry because, like Keats' ballad, it was written with very few alterations after the first draft, and we know a great deal about Coleridge's history at the time he wrote it.

In Xanadu did Kubla Khan
A stately pleasure-dome decree :
Where Alph, the sacred river, ran
Through caverns measureless to man
Down to a sunless sea.

So twice five miles of fertile ground
With walls and towers were girdled round ;
And there were gardens bright with sinuous rills
Where blossomed many an incense-bearing tree ;
And here were forests ancient as the hills,
Enfolding sunny spots of greenery.

But oh ! that deep romantic chasm which
slanted
Down the green hill athwart a cedarn cover !
A savage place ! as holy and enchanted
As e'er beneath a waning moon was haunted
By woman wailing for her demon-lover !
And from this chasm, with ceaseless turmoil
seething,
As if this earth in fast thick pants were breathing,

DREAMS AND POETRY

A mighty fountain momentarily was forced ;
Amid whose swift half-intermitted burst
Huge fragments vaulted like rebounding hail,
Or chaffy grain beneath the thresher's flail :
And 'mid these dancing rocks at once and ever
It flung up momentarily the sacred river.
Five miles meandering with a mazy motion
Through wood and dale the sacred river ran,
Then reached the caverns measureless to man,
And sank in tumult to a lifeless ocean :
And 'mid this tumult Kubla heard from far
Ancestral voices prophesying war !

The shadow of the dome of pleasure
Floated midway on the waves ;
Where was heard the mingled measure
From the fountain and the caves.
It was a miracle of rare device,
A sunny pleasure-dome with caves of ice !
A damsel with a dulcimer
In a vision once I saw :
It was an Abyssinian maid,
And on her dulcimer she played,
Singing of Mount Abora.
Could I revive within me
Her symphony and song,
To such a deep delight 'twould win me
That with music loud and long,
I would build that dome in air,

THE MEANING OF DREAMS

That sunny dome ! those caves of ice !
And all who heard should see them there,
And all should cry, Beware ! Beware !
His flashing eyes, his floating hair !
Weave a circle round him thrice,
And close your eyes with holy dread,
For he on honey-dew hath fed,
And drunk the milk of Paradise.

Critics agree to date *Kubla Khan*, May 1798, in spite of Coleridge himself having nine years later postdated it to the summer of 1799, and in 1816 having predated it to 1797. This pre-and-post-dating can be understood when we see what an unhappy time for Coleridge May 1798 was, and as I have shown, the tendency is to forget things which are painful to remember. Coleridge in fact could not afford to connect in his mind the poem which had won him such fame and the conflicts which had originally produced it. If we accept May 1798 we find that it was on the 14th of this month that his son Berkeley Coleridge was born, and I believe that the poem must have occurred just before this.

In De Quincey's *Reminiscences of the English Lake Poets*, an account is given of the relations existing about this time between Coleridge, his wife and Dorothy Wordsworth. De Quincey

DREAMS AND POETRY

writes : “ In the midst of our conversation the door opened and a lady entered. She was in person full and rather below the common height ; whilst her face showed to my eye some prettiness of rather a commonplace order. Coleridge paused upon her entrance ; his features, however, announced no particular complacency, and did not relax into a smile. In a frigid tone he said, whilst turning to me, ‘ Mrs. Coleridge ’ ; in some slight way he then presented me to her : I bowed ; and the lady almost immediately retired. From this short but ungenial scene, I gathered what I afterwards learned redundantly, that Coleridge’s marriage had not been altogether a happy one. . . . I go on therefore to say, that Coleridge afterwards made me, as doubtless some others, a confidant in this particular. What he had to complain of was simply incompatibility of temper and disposition. . . . Hearing from everybody that Coleridge was a man of most extraordinary endowments and attaching little weight perhaps to the distinction between popular talents and such as by their very nature are doomed to a slower progress in the public esteem, she naturally looked to see, at least, an extraordinary measure of worldly consequence attend upon their exercise. Now, had Coleridge been as persevering and punctual as the great mass of professional men, and had he given no

THE MEANING OF DREAMS

reason to throw the onus of the different result upon his own different habits, in that case this result might, possibly and eventually, have been set down to the peculiar constitution of his powers and their essential maladaptation to the English market. But this trial having never been fairly made, it was natural to impute his non-success exclusively to his own irregular application, and to his carelessness in forming judicious connections. . . . Coleridge, besides assured me that his marriage was not his own deliberate act, but was in a manner forced upon his sense of honour by the scrupulous Southey, who insisted that he had gone too far in his attention to Miss Fricker for any honourable retreat. On the other hand, a neutral spectator of the parties protested to me, that, if ever in his life he had seen a man under a deep fascination, and what he would have called desperately in love, Coleridge in relation to Miss F. was that man.

“Be that as it might; circumstances occurred soon after the marriage which placed all parties in a trying position for their candour and good temper. I had a full outline of the situation from two of those who were chiefly interested and a partial one from a third; nor can it be denied that all the parties offended in point of prudence. A young lady became a neigh-

DREAMS AND POETRY

bour, and a daily companion of Coleridge's walks, whom I will not describe more particularly than by saying that intellectually she was very much superior to Mrs. Coleridge. That superiority alone, when made conspicuous by its effects in winning Coleridge's regard and society, could not be but deeply mortifying to a young wife. . . . Still, it is a bitter trial to a young married woman to sustain any sort of competition with a female of her own age for any part of her husband's regard, or any share of his company. . . . Often it would happen that the walking party returned drenched with rain; in which case, the young lady with a laughing gaiety, and evidently unconscious of any liberty she was taking, or any wound she was inflicting, would run up to Mrs. Coleridge's wardrobe, array herself without leave asked in Mrs. Coleridge's dresses, and make herself merry with her own unceremoniousness and Mrs. Coleridge's gravity.

"In all this, she took no liberty that she would not have granted most readily in return. But Mrs. Coleridge viewed her freedoms with a far different eye; she felt herself no longer the entire mistress of her own house; and it barbed the arrow of her womanly feelings when Coleridge treated any sallies of resentment which might sometimes escape her as narrow-minded-

THE MEANING OF DREAMS

ness ; whilst on the other hand, her own female servant, and others in the same rank of life, began to drop expressions which alternately implied pity for her as an injured woman, or contempt for her as a very tame one. . . . My own impression is, that neither Coleridge nor Lord Byron would have failed eventually to quarrel with any wife, though a Pandora sent down from Heaven to bless him. But doubtless, this consummation must have been hastened by a situation which exposed Mrs. Coleridge to an invidious comparison with a more intellectual person ; as on the other hand, it was most unfortunate for Coleridge himself to be continually compared with one so ideally correct and regular in his habits as Mr. Southey. . . . And the restless activity of Coleridge's mind, in chasing abstract truths, and burying himself in the dark places of human speculation, seemed to me, in a great measure, an attempt to escape out of his own personal wretchedness. I was right. In this instance at least, I had hit the mark ; and Coleridge bore witness himself at an after period to the truth of my divination by some impressive verses."

The opinion of " the neutral spectator of the parties " (Wordsworth I imagine), seems to be supported by poems like *The Aeolian Harp* and *A Quiet Place*, written in 1795 ; in the

DREAMS AND POETRY

October of which year Coleridge married. It was in the summer of the same year that he met Wordsworth, who in 1797 came to live in Nether Stowey to be near him. So much for that side of the conflict. But matters were aggravated by a further conflict that arose between Coleridge and his friends and admirers, Lloyd, Lamb and Hazlitt. In order to console his spirit he had again taken to drugs, a habit begun in 1796 or even earlier when he was a student at Cambridge, and he was now attempting to justify himself in his letters.

Brandt, in his life of Coleridge, discusses the effect of opium on the poet. "After a dose he would sleep—a deep sleep of the outer senses for three hours during which all life centred morbidly in the imagination. A country bower among green hills appeared to his inward sight; his beloved lay fondly at his side; music sounded and a prophetic mood possessed him inspiring both surprise and awe. This was a favourite idyllic situation with him, the same that meets us first in *The Aeolian Harp*; even the 'circling honey drops' the paradisaal sweetness, with melody in addition, repeated themselves in this mood." Brandt then relates how the poem came to be written. Coleridge's own account is interesting though the "anodyne prescribed for a slight indisposition" is possibly

THE MEANING OF DREAMS

a mis-statement made in all good faith. Coleridge never recovered from the drug habit.

In the summer of the year 1797, the author, then in ill health, retired to a lonely farmhouse between Porlock and Lynton, on the Exmoor confines of Somerset and Devonshire. In consequence of a slight indisposition, an anodyne had been prescribed, from the effect of which he fell asleep in his chair at the moment he was reading the following sentence, or words of the same substance, in Purchas's *Pilgrimage*: "Here the Khan Kubla commanded a place to be built, and a stately garden thereunto; and thus ten miles of fertile ground were inclosed with a wall." The author continued for about three hours in a profound sleep, at least of the external senses, during which time he has the most vivid confidence that he could not have composed less than from two to three hundred lines; if that indeed can be called composition in which all the images rose up before him as things, with a parallel production of the correspondent expressions, without any sensation or consciousness of effort. On awaking he appeared to himself to have a distinct recollection of the whole, and taking his pen, ink, and paper, instantly and eagerly

DREAMS AND POETRY

wrote down the lines that are here preserved. At this moment he was unfortunately called out by a person on business from Porlock, and detained by him above an hour, and on his return to his room, found, to his no small surprise and mortification, that though he still retained some vague and dim recollection of the general purport of the vision, yet, with the exception of some eight or ten scattered lines and images, all the rest had passed away like the images on the surface of a stream into which a stone had been cast, but, alas ! without the after restoration of the latter.

Then all the charm
Is broken—all that phantom-world so fair
Vanishes, and a thousand circlets spread,
And each mis-shape the other. Stay awhile,
Poor youth ! who scarcely dar'st lift up thine
eyes—

The stream will soon renew its smoothness,
soon

The visions will return ! And lo ! he stays,
And soon the fragments dim of lovely forms
Come trembling back, unite, and now once more
The pool becomes a mirror.

Yet from the still surviving recollections
in his mind, the Author has frequently

THE MEANING OF DREAMS

purposed to finish for himself what had been originally, as it were, given to him. "To-morrow I shall sing more sweetly, but the to-morrow is yet to come."

The only other literary source to which we are referred, again by Coleridge himself, is Maurice's *History of Hindoostan* in which occurs the phrase, "In a cave in the mountains of Cashmere an image of ice." Here then is the setting; what of the interpretation? It is best to start with the easiest part of the symbolism and work back to the less obvious. The last part of the poem, then, seems to be closely connected with the opium-eating conflict, a justification of these habits on the ground that the vivid and emotional visions which the drug gives him will one day be translated into a poetry that will stagger the world. This part of the poem is also closely connected with those dreams of disappointed ambition which I described in an earlier chapter; he is making himself half-divine on the strength of his genius, not only to impress his friends who are losing confidence in him, but also as a weapon against his ambitious and disillusioned wife.

His attitude towards his wife in this matter makes a connecting link, as I read the poem, with the earlier part. Coleridge is evidently

DREAMS AND POETRY

thinking of himself in terms of the serene and powerful Kubla. It must be noticed that the pleasure dome, the delightful bower into which Coleridge always retired under the influence of opium, was built midway between the haunted and half-human chasm from which the stream issued and the gloomy caverns into which it sank, a retreat from both.

But even this idyllic spot was not secure from the gloomy prophecies uttered from afar. I do not think it fanciful to suggest that these distant voices were in one sense, those of Lamb and Lloyd making their gloomy prophecies as to the fate of the drugtaker; in another they were probably the reminder that while the life of England was threatened by war with France, it was hardly the duty of an Englishman, even a genius, to bury himself far off in the West Country and weaken his spirit with opium.

What of the romantic chasm and the woman wailing for her demon lover? I would suggest that this refers to the former strong passion that Coleridge had felt for his wife who was now bitterly reproaching him for his supposed unfaithfulness; but I will not insist on this interpretation. The caves into which this river sinks to run underground in the lifeless ocean would represent in this sense the Berkeley Coleridge part of the story, his wife's condition

THE MEANING OF DREAMS

at the time complicating his attitude towards her and making her reproaches on the ground of his unfaithfulness still more bitter, so that the retreat was more needed than ever. In a more general sense the river is probably also the life of man, from birth to death ; we understand from the poem that Coleridge has determined to shun the mazy complications of life by retreating to a bower of poetry, solitude and opium. The caves of ice are puzzling. We do not know who the beloved was who lay fondly at his side in his usual opium dreams, certainly it was not his wife at this time. For Dorothy, Coleridge's admiration was an intellectual one only, as De Quincey makes clear, so that the caves of ice are possibly a symbolic way of saying that thoughts of a passionate nature did not disturb his serene retreat.

The end of the poem would naturally gratify Keats when he recalled it in 1819, his poetic ambition being so strong, and I believe that the reason of *Kubla Khan's* popularity is that it provides a fine defence for all dreamers who suffer from a feeling of inferiority to their more stalwart and hearty neighbours ; and this appreciation rises in the reader's mind as the result of the same imaginative thinking that produced the poem, without the need of any

DREAMS AND POETRY

long-winded translation into a more logical form.

It would be a good thing perhaps to record here, without any thought of its comparative poetic merit, a poem of mine written in 1921, with an account of the events that produced it, and a suggested interpretation found for it when the conflict was over.

THE GNAT.

The shepherd Watkin heard an inner voice
Calling " My creature, ho ! be warned, be
 ready ! "
Calling, " The moment comes, therefore be
 ready ! "
And a third time calling, " Creature, be ready ! "

This old poor man mistook the call, which
 sounded
Not for himself, but for his pensioner.
Now (truth or phantasy) the shepherd nourished
Fast in his brain, due earnings of transgression,
A creature like to that avenging fly
Once crept unseen in at Duke Titus' ear,
Tunnelling gradually inwards, upwards,
Heading for flowery pastures of the brain,
And battened on such grand, presumptuous fare
As grew him brazen claws and brazen hair

THE MEANING OF DREAMS

And wings of iron mail. Old Watkin felt
A like intruder channelling to and fro.
He cursed his day and sin done in past years,
Repentance choked, pride that outlawed his
heart,

So that at night often in thunderous weather
Racked with the pain he'd start
From sleep, incontinently howling, leaping,
Striking his hoar head on the cottage walls,
Stamping his feet, dragging his hair by the roots.
He'd rouse the Gnat to anger, send it buzzing
Like a huge mill, scraping with metal claws
At his midpoint of being ; forthwith tumble
With a great cry for Death to stoop and end him.

Now Watkin hears the voice and weeps for bliss,
The voice that warned " Creature, the time is
come ".

Merciful Death, was it Death, all his desire ?
Promised of Heaven, and speedy ? O Death,
come !

Only for one thought must he make provision,
For honest Prinny, for old bob-tail Prinny.
Another master ? Where ? These hillside
crofters

Were spiteful to their beasts and mercenary.
Prinny to such ? No, Prinny, too, must die.

DREAMS AND POETRY

By his own hand, then ? Murder ! By what
other ?

No human hand should touch the sacrifice,
No human hand ;
God's hand then, through his temporal minister.

Three times has Watkin in the morning early
When not a soul was rising, left his flock,
Come to the Minister's house through the cold
mist,
Clicked at the latch and slowly moved the gate,
Faltered, held back and dared not enter in.
“ Not this time, Prinny, we'll not rouse them yet.
To-morrow, surely, for our death is tokened,
My death and your death with small interval.
We meet in fields beyond ; be sure of it, Prinny ! ”

On the next night
The busy Gnat, swollen to giant size,
Pent-up within the skull, knew certainly,
As a bird knows in the egg, his hour was come.
The thrice repeated call had given him sum-
mons . . .

He must out, crack the shell, out, out !
He strains, claps his wings, arches his back,
Drives in his talons, out ! out !

In the white anguish of this travail, Watkin
Hurls off his blankets, tears an axe from the nail

THE MEANING OF DREAMS

Batters the bed, hews table, splits the floor,
Hears Prinny whine at his feet, leaps, strikes
again,
Strikes, yammering.

At this instant with a clatter
Noise of a bursting dam, a toppling wall,
Out flies the new-born creature from his mouth
And humming fearsomely like a huge engine
Rackets about the room, smites the unseen
Glass of half-open windows, reels, recovers,
Soars out into the meadows, and is gone.

Silence prolonged to an age. Watkin still lives?
The hour of travail by the voice foretold
Brought no last throbbings of the dying Body
In child-birth of the Soul. Watkin still lives.

Labourer Watkin delves in the wet fields.
Did an old shepherd die that night with Prinny,
Die weeping with his head on the outraged
corpse?

Oh, he's forgotten. A dead dream, a cloud.
Labourer Watkin delves, drowsily, numbly,
His harsh spade grates among the buried stones.

The story about the Gnat and Titus is an
old Jewish legend ; the story about the shepherd
is a true one, from St. Ives in Cambridgeshire,
and hardly altered. The old man was under

DREAMS AND POETRY

the delusion that he had something alive inside his head hurting him, as a punishment for wrong done, and the Gnat was a convenient way for me to represent this delusion. The rest of the story is left unaltered except that it was not a minister whom he wanted to kill his dog, but a farmer ; and whether or not in the day that the shepherd killed his dog and madness thereupon left him, he did have the delusion of the Gnat flying out through his mouth, I do not know, but certainly he was raving mad at the time. When I wrote the poem, which no longer affects me strongly when I read it, I remember having been in a most agonized condition of mind for which I was quite unable to account, except that I felt an immense sympathy with the shepherd.

I can say now definitely that I understand what the whole conflict was about. I was at the time suffering badly from so-called shell-shock, the result of prolonged trench service, wounds and a fear that war might break out all over again. Nineteen hundred and twenty-one was a very anxious year, there being wars and rumours of wars in Russia, Ireland, the Near East and elsewhere, and my nervous condition got worse. I did not at the time realise that the fear of war was giving me all this trouble and was under the impression that if I allowed myself

THE MEANING OF DREAMS

to be treated by a professor of the New Psychology (believing then in Freud and Jung as I no longer do), I could get cured by having my dreams interpreted. That was of course silly, but the silliness is not the question here. My only objection to the idea of going to one of these psychologists was a fear that I might be too completely cured ; I had heard that the result of being cured was that if you happened to be a poet (as I prided myself on being), you could never write poetry again, it was killing the goose of the golden eggs. The conflict in my mind was, therefore, this, which is the more important, poetic ambition or a quiet mind ?

In waking life I decided that at all costs I must get cured ; in the dream-life, or rather the mood of poetic inspiration, the beaten side asserted itself. The *Gnat* is an assertion that to be rid of the gnat (shell-shock) means killing the sheep dog (poetry) and when the sheep dog is dead, the shepherd ceases to be a shepherd and must become a labourer ; that is, I would have to give up being a shepherd and become a labourer ; in fact, I would have to give up being a poet and become a schoolmaster or a bank-clerk. The minister to whom the shepherd could not make up his mind to go was, in this sense, the psychologist ; I had made several

DREAMS AND POETRY

half-hearted approaches to various doctors but never took treatment. The conflict ended only when I discovered the true cause of my illness, and decided that not only was it impossible to get cured by mere interpretation, but that such interpretation has no more power to end poetry than it has to stop dreaming. The dreams or the poetry will change, and that is all. It would take too long to discuss all the symbolic history of this poem, but the Gnat itself has many attributes which connect it with a war-neurosis ; it holds suggestions of air-raids, of the zero-hour for attack, and of the crazy noise of battle. The last line of the poem probably refers to psychoanalysis ; meaning that all that will be left for me when I have ceased to be a poet will be scraping among the buried and unfruitful memories of the past.

It is, of course, not every poem that is symbolic ; as is also the case with dreams. But it can be said that wherever the mood of inspiration has produced a poem or drama for which the poet cannot give a logical explanation, that poem or drama is allegorical and capable, if we know the life that produced it, of a fairly close interpretation. Often the poet uses symbolism with knowledge of its meaning, that is, he could give a logical interpretation of it : wherever that happens the poem can be called Classical as

THE MEANING OF DREAMS

opposed to Romantic. Poetry that is Classical, or that does not use symbolism at all, rises out of a state of mind corresponding with light sleep ; there may be emotion then, but there is none of that queer inspirational feeling that gladdens the romantic heart, and when the poem is written it does not surprise and puzzle the poet with the feeling, " I'm sure *I* didn't write this."

What I have written in Chapter VI about the value of dreams on their own account applies importantly here. I am far from suggesting that to appreciate poetry of a not-logical kind it is necessary first to translate it into a logical form ; understanding by the reader must always, in the first case, come in the same method of thought as gave the poem birth. But I hold strongly that a fuller understanding by means of interpretation into a more logical form is not to be despised and often gives us a greater sympathy with the poem than we had before.

Objection against such interpretations will be found to come from people who find a retreat from practical life in the reading or writing of romantic poetry and wish to keep poetry as a region secure from invasion by science and logic and commonsense. But as a matter of fact, the logical interpretation of a not-logical poem does not in any way affect its value as a

DREAMS AND POETRY

poem or even explain it altogether ; as a poem it has a certain intense and not to be defined quality which must disappear in translation. The same is true about religious experiences ; there is always a connection between these and the psychology that we have been studying here in the light of dreams ; but to give an account of some variety of religious experience in terms of conflict between rival modes of behaviour, is not to give the experience itself. Between logical and not-logical experience there can be a close alliance ; to set them at variance with greater preference for one than for the other is disastrous for both.

THE END



BENEDICTINE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

154.63G776M

C001

THE MEANING OF DREAMS NEW YORK



3 2811 00003 3011